Histrionic Future Kings: The Politics of Metadrama in Shakespeare's *Richard III*, *Richard II*, and *Henry IV Part 1*

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HISTRIONIC FUTURE KINGS:

THE POLITICS OF METADRAMA IN SHAKESPEARE'S

RICHARD III, *RICHARD II*, *AND HENRY IV PART 1*

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INTRODUCTION

In the last fifteen years of the sixteenth century, professional theatre developed in a way that was unprecedented. At the same time, the social and religious context was particularly unstable due to the Reformation and the fact that Queen Elizabeth I's life and reign were coming to an end without an heir in sight. It is no surprise, then, that some of the anxiety around the sources of education and ideas for the public, especially when relating to the transfer of power, focused on the theatre. Early modern critics such as Stephen Gosson and Philip Stubbes wrote pamphlets like *The Schoole of Abuse* (Gosson, 1579) and *The Anatomie of Abuses* (Stubbes, 1585), denouncing the threat to virtue and morality that the theatre represented; they argued that it could only exacerbate 'the confused or already corrupted values of the audience' (Hilliard, 225, about Gosson) which was mainly composed of uneducated — and therefore, impressionable — people. On the other side of the controversy could be found *The Defense of Poesy* (1595) by Sir Philip Sidney and Thomas Heywood's *An Apology for Actors* (1612), which defended the good intentions of the artists behind the works as well as their aesthetics.[1]

Whilst the debate was tense and censorship was an undeniable risk, dramatists participated in the reflection, approaching it from an 'oblique angle', to use Stephen Greenblatt's expression (2018, 5), through their plays. Shakespeare's histories thus allowed him to ponder the notions of kingship and the transfer of power with the clarity of historical distance (*ibid.*). The exceptional understanding of his medium that his experience as actor, playwright and shareholder in the theatre afforded him also meant

[1] For a summary of Sidney's position on these issues, see Slotkin, 9-10. As for Heywood's, see Kastan, 1986, 464. For a survey of the controversy as a whole between detractors and defenders of the theatre, see Barton, 82.

that he was able to play with the expectations around drama, representing its own process on stage and incorporating its own critique.

Indeed, reflecting on the workings of drama could even be said to serve the analysis and critique of the exercise of power: critics such as David Scott Kastan (1986) have identified the link between the dramatic representation of power and the performance that is inherent to kingship. The deconstruction of the illusion of drama through metadramatic comments and practices could, then, call into question the authenticity of the performance of power. Drama itself is also potentially subversive in its essence, as it involves a momentary suspension of disbelief, during which an actor can be recognised as a king provided that he dons the clothes and props appropriate to such a status — and, importantly, that he plays the role convincingly enough. When this process is highlighted, it challenges the myth of 'essential and immutable identities' (Kastan, 1986, 464) that is so crucial to ensure consistent trust and belief in kingship. Thus, the theatre's 'counterfeit of royalty raises the possibility that royalty is a counterfeit' (*ibid*.). Drama thus appears as an ambiguous tool as it proves crucial in the exercise of power at the same time as it uncovers the illusory quality of such power.

The belief that drama could foster political thought was by no means limited to the professional artists, as documented anecdotes such as the ill-fated Essex rebellion of 1601 show: the leaders commissioned the play *Richard II* to be performed on the eve of the rebellion, apparently hoping that it would embolden Londoners enough to overthrow the Queen's reign with them. In this context, as Kastan underlines, the performance could be, and was, considered part of Essex's treasonous plot (473). Elizabeth herself made the connection in her famous recorded conversation with her royal archivist William Lambarde the same year, declaring 'I am Richard II, know ye not that?' (quoted by Orgel,

11). As a matter of fact, the deposition scene, which is supposed to have inspired such controversy, was never included in printed versions of the play before the 1608 Quarto; although Richard Dutton discusses the possibility that it was perhaps added then rather than suppressed earlier (1993, 25). Additionally, the detractors of the theatre based their argumentation on the potentially nefarious effects of representing sinful and radical ideas on stage (Kastan, 1986, 464). As a result, far from being secluded to an artistic and fictional sphere, drama can be viewed as constituting an integral part of political and public life at the time, offering a reflection on how to influence people and their actions.

I would like to suggest that Shakespeare participates in fashioning and highlighting the relationship between power and drama: he thus explores kingship and the transfer of power not only within the plot of his plays but also through the prism of theatricality itself as a political tool. Indeed, the spectacle of power that is necessary to obtain, and hold on to, the crown, is considered in terms of role-playing, both recognising its association with duplicity and manipulation — the same suspicions that surrounded professional actors and theatres — and considering the effectiveness of such role-playing and its participation in strengthening authority.

My research focuses on future kings rather than established ones, to show what the construction of power looks like and how theatricality is an intrinsic part of it, either by ensuring or causing to lose the support of one's subjects and followers in accessing the throne. Richard II constitutes an exception in that he already occupies the throne when the play begins; however, his histrionics are constitutive of his identity as king in addition to being the reason he is forced to forego his position. Moreover, Bolingbroke's pragmatic use of theatrics to obtain power cannot be satisfactorily investigated without studying the contrast it offers to Richard II's own immersive approach.

My method is to analyse instances of metadrama in the three plays, while referencing some cultural materialism to give my argument some historical and political context, as theatre could be seen not only as reflecting the ideas and questions circulating at the time, but also actively contributing and responding to them. The order in which I treat the plays follows that in which they were written, as it can also be said to represent Shakespeare's own developing and changing view both of kingship and drama. [2]

Richard III and *Richard II* thus both follow the trajectory of a character who seizes the crown through dramatic means despite not being in line for the throne, as well as Richard II's complementary fall from power, which, it can be argued, is also due to his own attitude toward his role as King. *Richard III* exhibits all the brilliantly effective but dangerously manipulative manoeuvres that the theatre offers by showing how the Duke of Gloucester, an unquestionably evil character and self-confessed 'villain' (*Richard III*, 1.1.25), manages to perform himself into power despite being in a state of disgrace. Therefore, the play can be considered to illustrate the sinister effects of drama which were associated with the stage Machiavel and crystallised the anxieties connected with play-acting.

Contrary to 'the Machiavellian Proteus of Richard III' (Barish, 106) who plays with as many masks as necessary to reach his goal, Richard II is an actor of one role only. His Christological, absolutist view of monarchy means that his identity is thoroughly fixed and dependant on his role as King. Consequently, he ultimately loses the one when deprived of the other. It is however interesting to note that the famous deposition scene, which ratifies the defeat, not only of absolutist monarchy but also of Richard's approach

[2] Anne Righter Barton, for instance, argues in *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* that the dramatist's opinion of his medium became more complex and ambiguous throughout his career, as she analyses it through the lens of the play metaphor.

to the role of King, is also the moment when he displays the greatest theatrical mastery and control, suggesting an almost ornamental view of the dramatic arts. Poetically, the power to be listened to is the last right that he loses as a King and as an actor.

Conversely, Bolingbroke uses theatrics in a much more pragmatic and political way: he knows how to act and what to say to win the favour of the people. Yet he is extremely aware of the fragility of his stance as king, since the same arguments that he used to depose Richard could be used against him. His practical approach also leads to a lack of the aura that defined Richard II's reign by cheapening the meaning behind the royal title and exposing the workings of the illusion of power.

This, together with the guilt of having committed a regicide, makes the new King Henry IV defensive and anxious that his son behave appropriately so as not to cause any more damage to his reputation. *Henry IV Part 1* thus opposes a King desperate to hold on to his throne despite being accused of illegitimacy and opportunistic abuse of his allies' good will and support to his son Hal, who must act to restore both his father's opinion of him as well as all the realm's view of kingship. Hal proves a strong counterpoint to Henry, showing that political calculations and controlling his image does not have to cost him his honour. His legitimate claim to the throne perhaps helps him in acting confidently to establish his histrionic dominance over his three main foils in the play, on three different stages: Falstaff in the tavern, Hotspur on the battlefield, and his own father in the political court of opinion. These three dramatic victories therefore seem to prefigure his future as the ideal King Henry V and to confirm that a good actor makes a good king.

CHAPTER 1: *RICHARD III*

When thinking of the relationship between drama and power, and the use of theatrics as an integral part of ascending the throne, *Richard III* readily comes to mind. The play is rife with metadrama, which Richard gleefully exploits and bends to his will, along with various other characters, on his path to obtain the crown. However, while dramatic tools efficiently allow Richard to perform himself into power, they are useless — and indeed, harmful — when he needs to stabilise his identity and power as King. Indeed, drama allows any skilled actor to embody a character of a higher status, eliciting a transformation contained within the confines of the play.

This is precisely what scared the Puritan authorities and the opponents to the theatre. Not only did it suggest that anyone could use such illusions to deceive others outside of the theatre (inspired, no doubt, by what the audience would have seen achieved on stage), but also because it went against the very principle of constancy at the basis of Renaissance ideology, when identity was God-given and sacrosanct (Barish, 92, 104). Louis Montrose emphasises the 'stunning anomaly' that 'professional players' represented, as '[t]hey were men who made their living by pretending to be what they were not; their calling was to imitate the callings of others' (37). The subversive potential of such exemption from the strict hierarchical rules of early modern society was thus feared and critiqued.

This ontological ambiguity which allowed the actor to impersonate any character in any context outside of his reality could be said to reflect the pursuit and exercise of power, with its campaigns to seduce and impress one's partisans and subjects by adapting one's discourse and self-presentation to one's audience. Anne Righter Barton notes this

parallel by recalling Elizabeth I's remark on princes being like actors who 'stand upon a stage in the sight of all the world' (113).[3] Barton further explains that this comparison may be said to 'testify to the reflexive power of the play metaphor. Not only is the actor on the stage committed in the world of illusion to play the king, but the living monarch may see in the player's performance a true dimension of kingship itself' (*ibid*.). In *Richard III*, the Duke of Gloucester navigates various situations wherein he finds himself doubted and opposed by choosing the right form of speech, mask and attitude to obtain support and obedience. This culminates in his obtention of the crown, which he successfully usurps, although the crown should only ever be a God-given right, bestowed upon an heir with a legitimate claim to the throne. Consequently, the play could be said to represent a dangerous instability in power, an instability which echoes that of theatrical ontology.

I argue in this chapter that whilst Richard uses this changeability to his advantage for the first three acts, he faces a new challenge from 4.2 on when he attempts to maintain a stable identity as King. Indeed, this royal identity — the 'body politic' as it is defined by Ernst Kantorowicz[4] — may be the most necessarily constant, as it passes, unchanged, from one person to the next through the crown and ointment. Barton links this process to the embodiment of 'a kind of dramatic rôle' that is inalterable:

> In the ceremony of coronation, an individual assumes what is essentially … a specific part which he must interpret, but which he may not, in its fundamental respects, change. It is a part, however, with which he is completely identified thereafter, from which he cannot be separated except by violence. (113-14)

[3] Barton here refers to J. E. Neale. *Queen Elizabeth.* Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1934, pp. 277-8.

[4] Kantorowicz explains that the 'eternal essence or "godhead" of the monarch [i.e. the body politic]' (14) still lives with regards to the law, even though the person [i.e. the body natural] might be dead. As such, '[t]he body politic of kingship … represents … the Immutable within Time' (8, quoting Sir John Fortescue. *The Governance of England*. n.d. Edited by Charles Plummer, Oxford, 1885, 121).

However, upholding this mask and persona proves too much for Richard, as it stands in contradiction with his chameleonic, Machiavellian character (Barish, 99).[5] Since his identity only consists of performance, Richard then completely unravels through the loss of his dramatic self-awareness. Alexander Leggatt notes the irony in Richard's situation: 'the role he has sought so long is the one role he cannot effectively play' (36). Drama, which once helped him obtain power, becomes the reason he loses it.

Richard demonstrates his control of theatrics, which he uses to assert his power over other characters in the play, in various ways. Even before interacting with another character, he displays his rhetorical ability to the audience in his first, startling soliloquy, establishing himself as the theatrical authority within the world of the play. The initial trochaic inversion in the first line — '*Now* is the winter of our discontent' (1.1.1, emphasis mine) — forcefully locates the play in time, the deictic '[n]ow' giving the more general 'winter' a personal and figurative meaning. This is confirmed by the rest of the line which focuses on Richard's emotional, 'discontent[ed]' response to his circumstances. In addition, the suggestion of a majestic first plural possessive pronoun centres this exposition around him and emphasises his sense of self-importance and his ambition.

The soliloquy then establishes a series of effective antitheses which expose the changed situation in England from a state of war to a time of peace and light entertainment, in which, as a bellicose cripple, Richard finds no place for himself. Indeed, if the use of the first plural pronoun initially seems to suggest his inclusion in these societal changes, an abrupt 'But I' (1.1.14) soon pits him against the rest of the state. In this second part of the speech, the subject pronoun 'I' is separated from the main verb,

[5] Barish examines part of Gloucester's soliloquy in *Henry VI Part 3* (3.2.182-95), when he announces his ambition to use his wide range of acting abilities to become king.

which is delayed by multiple non-restrictive clauses detailing the various reasons that isolate him from the other members of the court 'in this weak piping time of peace' (1.1.24). This interval is highlighted by an anaphora of the pronoun, which appears no less than four times (at lines 1.1.14, 16, 18 and 24), and twice in an emphatic trochaic inversion (lines 16 and 18). This effectively distances him by ten lines from the possibility of having any 'delight to pass away the time' (1.1.25). He thus introduces himself as an outsider, managing in the process to accuse a personified 'dissembling Nature' (1.1.19) of being responsible for his inability to adapt to these new circumstances and speciously justifying his recourse to 'villain[y]' (30), 'fals[ity] and treacher[y]' (37) as the only other alternative. Moreover, his ominous revelation, 'Plots have I laid, inductions dangerous' (32), with its metadramatic overtones, not only helps characterise him as an evil mastermind, but also functions as an announcement of the play that follows. Therefore, Richard demonstrates his dramatic mastery by playing the role of Prologue (or Chorus) who expounds the initial situation and foreshadows its complications, introduces the protagonist as the villain and explains his motives; meanwhile, he also plays his own role, using the very construction of his discourse to substantiate who he claims to be.

This first speech is all the more remarkable as it is a unique occurrence for a Shakespearian character to be graced with an opening soliloquy; comparatively, even Marlowe's villainous protagonists Faustus and Barabas — who share many traits with Richard — are introduced by a Prologue or a Chorus figure (Leggatt, 32), significantly embodied by a stage Machiavel in *The Jew of Malta.* The Duke of Gloucester, who has already been established as a Machiavellian character in *Henry VI Part 3* ('Why, I can smile, and murder whiles I smile', 3.2.182), can thus be said to relate here to the Vice, the evil stock character in medieval morality plays who also enjoys a double point of view

on the ‘dramatic action, outside as commentator and inside as participant’ (Siemon, 6). Consequently, Richard appears to the audience as both rhetorically and theatrically powerful.

More importantly, and like his predecessor the Vice is also wont to do, Richard uses this privileged time with the audience to establish a complicit relationship with them by letting them in on his plans from the beginning. Gillian Day argues that this removes the possibility of suspension of disbelief, because Richard highlights the metadramatic aspects of his double role in his speech. Accordingly, not only does he take on the external part of a Prologue, but Day also notes his multiple references to the theatrical world:

> The change from a war footing to the more dancing pleasures of Edward's court is conveyed in mocking images recalling stage enactments, 'stern alarums', 'brows bound with victorious wreaths’. Even personified war itself performs to a lute like some masquer. To subvert this complete masquerade Richard has laid plots and inductions as would any villain of the piece, his part also 'determined' by prescript: and he invites us to watch him acting. (149)

Moreover, Day remarks that the audience has ‘silent […] representatives’ (150) on stage every time Richard manages to manipulate another character successfully, a fact she considers ‘an ever-present reminder of [the] artifice’ (*ibid.*) of Richard’s performance. This, according to her, participates in undermining the soundness of his arguments, both in trying to win his fellow characters and the audience.

Nevertheless, it seems to me that this self-awareness, as evidenced by his claim that he is ‘subtle, false and treacherous’ (1.1.37), is what forces the audience into admiring the sheer audacity of his manoeuvres. He does not hide to us nor to others who he is: the readers are warned in the original title of the first edition in 1597 that the tragedy will ‘*contai[n] [Richard’s] treacherous Plots against his brother Clarence: the pittiefull murther of his innocent nephewes: his tyrannicall usurpation: with the whole course of his detested life, and most deserved death*’ (quoted by Siemon, 1). The information

presented here already speaks to the poetic justice that awaits Richard in answer for his crimes and leaves the readers in no doubt as to what they must think of him, with such sanctimonious adjectives as ‘treacherous’, ‘pittiefull’, ‘tyrannical’, ‘detested’ and ‘deserved’. Within the world of the play itself, some of Richard’s most spectacular successes in overturning a character’s opinion of him happen with Anne, who calls him a ‘dissembler’ (1.2.187) and Elizabeth, who directly alludes to the ‘slaughter’ of her sons by Richard (4.4.201). Both, then, have undeniable grievances against him, Anne being a widow because of Richard, who also participated in killing her father-in-law. Therefore, it is the very fact that he can still win them — and us — over that makes us want to see what else he can accomplish with his tricks. The theatricality that renders these ploys transparent is what makes him attractive and fascinating to us.

Anne is a striking illustration of the appeal held by the noticeably treacherous games that Richard plays. Thus, Joel Elliot Slotkin remarks that ‘Richard seduces his most important victims not by successful deception, as many critics assume, but rather by an artful yet transparent gesturing at deception’ (8). According to him, ‘[t]hese “palpable devices” (3.6.11) allow the characters a complex, self-conscious engagement with Richard’ (*ibid.*). Indeed, Anne’s command to Richard in the first wooing scene, ‘Arise, dissembler’ (1.2.187), paradoxically underlines her awareness of his imposture when he tries to convince her to take revenge on him by killing him, while also suggesting that she could actually endorse his rise to power. Moreover, the verb ‘arise’, by conveying the elevation that Richard aspires to, foreshadows Anne’s capitulation ‘with all [her] heart’ (1.2.222) to his courtship, just thirty-five lines below. She is still, however, shown to doubt both his words and his motives between these two moments:

ANNE I would I knew thy heart.
RICHARD ’Tis figured in my tongue.

ANNE I fear me both are false. (1.2.195-7)

Thus, to Richard's fervent and grotesque declarations of love, that seek to confuse and charm her at the same time (he proposes to kill himself at her behest: 'even with the word, / This hand, which for thy love did kill thy love, / Shall for thy love kill a far truer love' (1.2.191-3)), she responds with annoyance — or amusement, perhaps, at his theatrics: 'Well, well, put up your sword' (1.2.199). With this possible double entendre, she seems to confirm the idea that plain evil can be attractive.

Ethics and aesthetics are thus both opposed and reunited in this character. On the one hand, Richard appears to corroborate the argument that theatricality is a dangerous tool that can be used to deceive and reach malevolent goals and so that it is morally wrong to appreciate this type of spectacle. On the other hand, the artfulness of his playing and his self-awareness in doing it for villainy's sake are satisfying and fascinating in themselves. Indeed, Richard claims in his first soliloquy that he is 'determined to prove a villain' (1.1.30), introducing this as his predominant ambition rather than the further goal of obtaining the crown, which was the case in *Henry VI Part 3* (as is noted by Slotkin, 12).[6] As a result, Richard both attracts and repulses his audience as he links ethics and aesthetics in a decidedly ambivalent manner.

These two perspectives on the moral effect of art were both present in the debate around the theatre at the time, as is attested by Sir Philip Sidney's *Defense of Poesy* (1595). While he tries to defend poetry, the theatre, and the virtuous power of fiction in general against such attacks as Stephen Gosson's in his pamphlet *The Schoole of Abuse* (1579), Slotkin remarks that Sidney 'incorporates two contradictory frameworks for

[6] Slotkin quotes this as evidence: 'It is the Richard of *3 Henry VI* who says "I'll make my heaven to dream upon the crown" (3.2.168)' (12).

understanding the relationship between aesthetics and ethics: a Platonic conception of beauty as an expression of the pleasure inherent in goodness and an Aristotelian belief in a pleasure inherent in all skilful representations' (9). As suggested above, Richard can be considered to epitomise both views, as his deformity sometimes symbolises his evil morals, which would support Plato's theory; yet Richard also manages to seduce his audience (both intra- and extradiegetically) despite his appearance and lacking moral value, in accordance with Aristotle's perspective.

To that end, Richard uses theatrical tools as a means to maintain a special relationship with his audience, namely by rewarding them with direct address or access to his inner thoughts. Thus, some of his asides create dramatic irony, giving the audience insider knowledge and even joking with them about his cunning plans for the other characters in the play. His conversation with his nephew the Prince, for instance, is rife with these allusions: 'I say, without characters fame lives long. / [*aside*] Thus, like the formal Vice, Iniquity, / I moralize two meanings in one word' (3.1.81-3). Not only does he mark his superiority over the Prince in his understanding of the situation, he also insists on his mastery of the theatrical arts, comparing himself with the Vice character in medieval plays. Therefore, Richard could be said to command respect from the audience by highlighting his grasp of both content and form in his dramatic manipulations.

As well as mastering double meaning allusions in his asides, Richard can also be viewed as embodying the role of stage director within the play. Indeed, he gives cues to other characters when they enter the stage for the first time. For example, he introduces Hastings at the end of one of his soliloquies, effectively marking the shift from his inner reflections to the dialogue, while also giving context for this character: 'But who comes here? The new-delivered Hastings?' (1.1.121). Furthermore, he also cues Clarence in

after his first soliloquy, but not before he instructs his own treacherous thoughts to hide from his brother: 'Dive, thoughts, down to my soul; here Clarence comes' (1.1.41). He thus directs both other characters on stage as well as himself.

Another, more complex, instance in which Richard gives stage directions is with Buckingham, who must help lay the ground for the acceptance of Richard as King. In a distinctly metadramatic scene, Richard asks his cousin what emotions he would be able to feign in order to convince the noblemen: 'Come, cousin, canst thou quake and change thy colour, / Murder thy breath in middle of a word, / And then again begin, and stop again, / As if thou were distraught and mad with terror?' (3.5.1-4). He even seems to be giving Buckingham an example of what he expects by playing with repetitions of sounds (alliteration of [k] sounds in 3.5.1) and words (chiasmus in 3.5.3), as well as interruptions in his own discourse, which are highlighted by the presence of commas. In his trust of Buckingham, Richard lets himself play with the very idea of acting, showing the range of acting styles and tools he has at his disposal.

Buckingham answers in the same way, playing off of his cousin's suggestions and confirming the pair's self-awareness in their use of theatrical tools:

> Tut, I can counterfeit the deep tragedian,
> Speak, and look back, and pry on every side,
> Tremble and start at wagging of a straw,
> Intending deep suspicion. Ghastly looks
> Are at my service, like enforced smiles,
> And both are ready in their offices,
> At any time to grace my stratagems. (3.5.5-11)

This description seems to point to an exaggerated style of acting, emphasising their shared mockery of the naïve audience who will be convinced by it. It could also be argued to function as an extradiegetic comment on contemporary actors and plays and, by extension, criticising the gullible spectators who appreciate these. These added layers of

meaning can also be perceived in Buckingham's phrase, 'counterfeit the deep tragedian', as it suggests the concept of playing an actor, who is himself deeply immersed in his role, while acknowledging the fact that it is all a simulacrum. This exchange marks in any case that acting, to them, is a tool 'at [their] service' (3.5.9), to be picked and chosen to suit their plans.

One striking example of this is the bishop scene in Act 3 Scene 7, when Richard stages a play and acts a specific part in order to obtain support from the noblemen of the court. Indeed, Gillian Day notes that this scene is complete with acting style, props and set, all carefully defined beforehand (151). Thus, Richard appears '*aloft, between two Bishops*' (3.7.93.1, stage direction), symbolising his purported moral high ground and piety, which is emphasised by the presence of a book of prayer in his hand. This position could also be seen as a stage within the play, figuring the lower position of the audience in contrast with the actor's. In addition, Buckingham playfully remarks on the theatricality of the setting by calling the two clergymen 'props of virtue for a Christian prince' (3.7.95), and together with the book of prayer, '[t]rue ornaments to know a holy man' (3.7.98). The terms 'props' and 'ornaments' highlight the deception in play, which sarcastically contrasts with the verb 'know'. In this instance of play-acting, Buckingham is the one directing Richard, instructing him to 'play the maid's part' (3.7.50), that is, to act coy and pretend not to accept too readily the responsibility of the crown. Buckingham underlines this effect later in front of the mayor and noblemen by claiming that they 'know [his] tenderness of heart / And gentle, kind, effeminate remorse' (3.7.209-10), lacing the exchange with dramatic irony and reference to their plan. Therefore, this metadramatic scene illustrates Richard and Buckingham's ability to make use of

theatrical tools as well as words referring to the theatre to deceive, mock and manipulate people into granting them the power they seek.

Beyond the use of words pertaining to drama, Richard and Buckingham both know how to use the power of rhetoric and language itself to bend reality to their wish. The words that they employ in their various performances are key to their success, and repeating them has a direct effect on materialising the aim of their plans. For instance, Buckingham deliberately introduces Richard as the new king: 'Then I salute you with this royal title: / Long live King Richard, England's worthy king!' (3.7.238-9). The repetition of the word 'king', as well as its paraphrastic designation, 'royal title', assert the new reality until all are forced to agree with him in a unanimous 'Amen' (3.7.240). Mary Thomas Crane recalls Judith Butler's concept of 'performativity',[7] which 'points to the ways in which the reiteration of words, gestures, and behaviors can shape reality. Here again, the emphasis is not on deception, but on repetition that can alter material reality' (170). While here it can safely be said that Richard and Buckingham's intent is duplicitous, the repetition does have the effect of 'alter[ing] material reality', as even Richard's character heading on the page changes after this moment: when he next appears in Act 4 Scene 2, his lines are headed with 'KING RICHARD' (4.2.1) as opposed to the previous mere 'RICHARD'. Moreover, Buckingham has been 'play[ing] the orator' (3.5.95) before Richard was to appear before the noblemen in order to spark gossip about King Edward and raise their suspicion of him and his right to the crown. These lies, spread thanks to Buckingham's persuasive acting, then take on a life of their own and could also be seen to create a new reality out of mere words. Consequently, it may be claimed that

[7] Crane quotes a discussion of the concept of performativity in Jon McKenzie's article: 'Genre Trouble: (The) Butler Did It'. *The Ends of Performance*, edited by Peggy Phelan and Jill Lane, New York UP, 1998, pp. 217-35.

Richard makes masterful use of the changeful ontology of drama and all its devices to seduce and convince more and more people, from just one person in Anne, to a few in the court, along with us in the audience. This allows him to effectively transform his status and identity to the extent that it is manifested on the material page of the play.

Richard III, as remarked above, is linked to the figure of Machiavel and its associations with deceitful use of play-acting and illusions, even to the point of his claiming to surpass Machiavel in his soliloquy as Duke of Gloucester in *Henry VI Part 3*: 'I can add colors to the chameleon, / Change shapes with Proteus for advantages, / And set the murderous Machiavel to school' (3.2.191-3). In his exploration of the Puritans' suspicion of actors, Jonas Barish explains that, of the two 'forms of theatricality' that are 'mimicry and ostentation', '[m]imicry — the power to become, or to pretend to become, what one is not — must be reckoned the more fundamental', as 'it arouses, and has always aroused, a nearly universal distrust' (96). Barish adds that the Machiavellian is considered 'the villain par excellence' in Renaissance English drama due to his 'exceptional powers of impersonation' (*ibid.*). Similarly to Machiavelli's motto of 'effectiveness' (*ibid.*), Richard is prepared to use any and all means necessary to achieve his goals: if he must appear desperately in love (in his interactions with Anne or Elizabeth) or pious and coy rather than murderously ambitious (with the Mayor and noblemen) to get to the crown, he has no quarrel in hoodwinking his target audience. Therefore, Richard demonstrates an uncanny ability to seem what he is not, acting as a perfect disciple of his Machiavellian precursor.

Yet his approach to theatrical roles is extremely subtle and paradoxical, as it is not only a matter of seeming as opposed to being, but of choosing performance over both. An instance of Richard's fine understanding of the layers of his roles can be found when he

congratulates himself in a soliloquy after succeeding in wooing Anne: 'And I, no friends to back my suit withal / But the plain devil and dissembling looks? / And yet to win her? All the world to nothing! / Ha!' (1.2.238-41). The paradoxical antithesis between the adjectives 'plain' and 'dissembling' underlines the complexity of his dramatic process, in which he elects to hide in plain sight. This is remarked upon by the Scrivener in his short summary of Richard's stratagems in Act 3 Scene 6: 'Who is so gross / That cannot see this palpable device? / Yet who so bold but says he sees it not?' (3.6.10-2). He thus recognises the transparency of Richard's dealings while also noting that he has now become powerful enough that others cannot confront him about those dealings. Consequently, Richard's theatrical techniques can be described as a mix of deception and claiming the mask of his own villainy. He ends up effectively using the reality of his being as a performance tool, going beyond simple pretence.

As a result, Richard appears to surpass the figure of Machiavel, hence confirming the Puritans' fear and suspicion of the theatre:

> The dramatic incorporation and censure of such a figure would seem to be a means by which the public and professional theatre sought to project, and thereby pre-emptively to contain, the dangerously subversive potential that its own mimetic powers appeared to pose to those cultural and political authorities who were in a position to harass it. At the same time, however, the uncontainable supplement of dramatic energy and pleasure generated by the acting of such a character as Richard III rendered that very theatrical power all the more palpable. (Montrose, 37-8)

According to Louis Montrose, then, Richard provides an irresistible representation of 'dramatic energy' that strains against its theatrical holds of set, time, costume and roles, by not only demonstrating the potential of dramatic illusions, but also winning his audience over to the very idea of the danger they perceive in their effectiveness. Moreover, the volatile ontology of drama defies the early modern philosophy of constancy, which Barish describes as a 'virtue' that was 'regularly recommend[ed]' by

'[s]ixteenth-century English drama' (104). While Richard displays his prowess in playing with these tools, his loss of control and consecutive demise reveal the traps of a life lived only from behind a theatrical mask.

Furthermore, it could be said that his being all but disappears behind the roles he plays. Richard thus strives to go further than just seeming to hide his being, electing to play a role instead. For instance, in a soliloquy foreshadowing his ostensibly pious appearance in front of the noblemen and the Mayor, he opposes the notions of 'seem[ing]' and 'play[ing]' (1.3.337), consequently erasing that of being:

> But then I sigh, and, with a piece of scripture,
> Tell them that God bids us do good for evil;
> And thus I clothe my naked villainy
> With odd old ends, stol'n forth of Holy Writ,
> And seem a saint when most I play the devil. (1.3.333-7)

Here, Richard alludes to the easy way he can pick up any actor's attitude (a 'sigh') and script ('a piece of scripture') to embody a part. What is more, the disdainful phrasing of 'odd old ends, stol'n forth of Holy Writ' emphasises the fact that he does not need much in order to play it convincingly. These elements serve to 'clothe [his] naked villainy', which could be interpreted as a simple façade covering his true evil being, the allusion to a theatrical costume suggesting so. Nevertheless, he then flips the concept on its head by adding that he uses all of this to 'seem a saint when most [he] play[s] the devil'. Consequently, his 'naked villainy' could be re-interpreted as yet another mask he wears to gain power. Regarding the last line of this passage, Slotkin remarks that 'Richard revises this expected antithesis so that seeming is instead opposed to playing, as if he recognizes no essential identity in himself apart from performance' (14). As a result, we never know when Richard is playing or not and he could be said to lose himself in the process as well.

Additionally, it can be noted that the devil is presented by Richard as a role to play, thereby relating evil to the theatre, as Slotkin observes:

> [T]he actor's art is fundamentally linked to evil in the world of the play. The play obsessively defines goodness as men being what they seem and evil as the creation of false appearances. The emphasis on devils and the Vice as roles that are played rather than as actual beings also suggests that theatricality and evil help to constitute each other in the world of the play. (15-6)

This idea is also conveyed in the play by means of the terms 'act' and 'perform', which are both used in their most sinister meaning. This may be evidenced when Tyrell alludes to the murder of the Princes by claiming that '[t]he tyrannous and bloody act is done' (4.3.1), thus giving the word 'act' its most concrete sense, linking it to its causes (tyranny) and very real effects (blood and murder) in the world of the play. Similarly, Richard uses the verb 'perform' as signifying the carrying out of orders, such as when he requests that his nephews be assassinated: 'Shall I be plain? I wish the bastards dead, / And I would have it suddenly performed' (4.2.18-9). These metadramatic words are employed to illustrate the harmful effects of Richard's actions and use of theatrical tools; drama, as a result, is presented in a most malevolent light.

Richard further blurs the lines between reality and representation by not only 'play[ing] the devil' (1.3.337), but also playing with evil, thus transcending it. He delights in playing on words, as mentioned above, which often distances him from the terrible consequences of his actions: elements of his first soliloquy studied above suggest a lack of agency in his decision to become evil. The hypallage that he uses to put the blame on 'dissembling Nature' (1.1.19) for his '[d]eformed' (1.1.20) appearance, which in turn leads him on an inevitable path of villainy, removes the accusation of 'dissembling' from himself, lowering his agency in the process. There is also a sense of predestination in the double meaning conveyed by his claim that he is 'determined to be a villain' (1.1.30),

which could be interpreted as a deliberate choice or as a way of clearing himself of any faults influenced by external factors. Moreover, he shamelessly accuses others of hypocrisy and deception, all the while cynically aware that he is guilty of the very same: Hastings is thus described as '[s]o smooth he daubed his vice with show of virtue' (3.5.29), Buckingham readily agreeing with him that Hastings 'was the covert'st sheltered traitor / That ever lived' (3.5.33-4). Similarly, Richard poisons his nephew's opinion of other members of the family by claiming they are 'false friends' (3.1.15), misleading in their 'outward show, which … / Seldom or never jumpeth with the heart' (3.1.10-1). Therefore, Richard could be said to consciously play with his own view of himself, partly flaunting his wickedness, partly separating himself from it.

In the end, however, playing with a lack of agency and having an identity only composed of the roles Richard interprets in order to change his status actually do him a disservice. Indeed, whereas dramatic tools have shown their efficiency in allowing him to transform his circumstances, they become useless, even harmful, when he attempts to maintain his position as king. Anne Righter Barton asserts the difference between the 'pomp and ceremony which surrounds the king' and 'an idle show' (114). The first, she explains, 'is the outward expression of authority, given meaning by the consecration of the ruler' (*ibid.*). Yet, while 'the actor who plays the king is, of course, invested with the trappings of royalty', Barton underlines that '[h]is splendour, … unlike that of the true king he imitates, is false, a mere pretence grounded upon no authority' (114-5). This insubstantiality leads Richard to lose his confidence in his theatrical control as soon as he obtains the role he strove for. Richard is aware of the fragility of his stance and no longer seems to rely solely on metadramatic devices to secure his position. He consequently

tasks Catesby with spreading the rumour that Anne is sick and likely to die and plans to marry his own niece so as to solidify his claim to the throne:

> Look how thou dream'st! I say again, give out
> That Anne my queen is sick and like to die.
> About it, for it stands me much upon
> To stop all hopes whose growth may damage me.
> *[Exit Catesby.]*
> I must be married to my brother's daughter
> Or else my kingdom stands on brittle glass.
> Murder her brothers, and then marry her — (4.2.56-62)

The fact that he is ready to resort to incest sheds light on Richard's deep fear as to his stability on the throne, which he compares to 'brittle glass' (4.2.61). After having removed his brothers from the line to the throne, he now frantically turns to the next generation which he sees as mere collateral damage in his pursuit of power.

Like the planned murder of his wife Anne and consecutive marriage to his niece, Richard's scheme to have his nephews assassinated is based on the fear that his reign may be put into question. His misunderstanding with Buckingham seems to confirm his anxiety that even his close supporters may come to challenge him. This occurs at the very moment his coronation has been acted, his lack of confidence appearing in stark contrast with his new speech prefix of 'KING RICHARD' in his conversation with Buckingham:

> KING RICHARD Why, Buckingham, I say I would be king.
> BUCKINGHAM Why so you are, my thrice-renowned lord.
> KING RICHARD Ha! Am I king? 'Tis so — but Edward lives.' (4.2.12-14)

The use of the conditional 'would', as well as the interjection and following question, all point to a doubtful king, unsure of his legitimacy.

Furthermore, Richard's impending loss of power is foreshadowed by a loss of control over words and rhetoric. While he used to enjoy an easy understanding with his cousin Buckingham when it came to actions he deemed necessary to his plans, he must now humiliatingly clarify his request, suddenly placing himself in a position where he

awaits Buckingham's agreement rather than simply ordering him to do his bidding: 'Shall I be plain? I wish the bastards dead. / …What sayst thou now? Speak suddenly. Be brief' (4.2.18-20). Richard's sudden loss of the rhetorical upper hand is manifest in that Buckingham dares respond — not at all briefly, incidentally — by asking for time to reflect on the request: 'Give me some little breath, some pause, dear lord, / Before I positively speak in this. / I will resolve you herein presently' (4.2.24-6). For the first time, then, Richard must face circumspection that effectively postpones the implementation of his plans and he resolves from then on to be only surrounded by 'iron-witted fools' (4.2.28) that cannot question him. This only serves to highlight his self-doubt and suggests an inferiority complex that was completely foreign to him before.

Going even beyond this lack of confidence, Richard's rhetorical sparring with Elizabeth in 4.4 betrays the beginnings of a loss of self-awareness and mastery of his parts and lines, prefiguring the complete breakdown of his identity in his last soliloquy. Thus, when Elizabeth asks him what he can 'demise to any child of [hers]' (4.4.248), he answers with 'Even all I have — ay, and myself and all' (4.4.249): the repetition of the sound in 'I' and 'ay' is followed by the suggestion of self-fragmentation in 'and myself and all', as though implying that he is ready to double down (and become a double of himself) to obtain his niece's hand in marriage. When Elizabeth fails to be convinced by this, Richard reveals his rhetorical inferiority as he attempts to swear on various symbolical elements, each of which is ruthlessly parred by Elizabeth. Gillian Day points out that '[his] performance disintegrat[es] into improvisation. Elizabeth's unexpectedly perceptive interpolations refuse to let him play the script, for it is she who now prosecutes the duplicity of words' (153). Richard's loss of dramatic control is stressed by the number of interruptions and the stichomythic nature of their dialogue. Elizabeth demonstrates her

superiority in this rhetorical joust in which Richard's oratory ability diminishes in parallel to his self-awareness.

Elizabeth shows him that there is nothing left he can invoke truthfully, forcing him to confront the fact that he cannot rely on anyone but himself. What is more, when he tries to swear 'by [him]self —' (4.4.374), she once again objects, interrupting him with a devastating 'Thyself is self-misused' (*ibid.*). Elizabeth appears to point to Richard's self-alienation before he recognises it in the last act — and Richard confirms it when as a last resort he curses himself to a life of misery if he is found lacking by his intended bride: 'Myself myself confound!' (4.4.399). This spiralling descent into self-accusations and loss of coherence and cohesion prefigures Richard's final soliloquy.

This last soliloquy, which follows the haunting visit from the ghosts of the victims of his crimes, marks a stark contrast with Richard's first address to the audience, as it reflects just how much his play with dramatic tools has affected him. While the Richard at the beginning of the play was in complete control of the show, seducing his audience with his rhetorical acuity and mastery of masks and roles, Alexander Leggatt notes that he does not appear to act for his spectators any longer. Instead, 'he is quite literally talking to himself, in anxious questions and answers whose circling movement shuts us out' (39). Richard seems to have lost the dramatic distance he used to enjoy from his role of the villain: he devolves from being 'determined to prove a villain' (1.1.30), to doubting whether he is, in fact, 'a villain' (5.3.191). Gillian Day comments on this ontological shift into uncomfortable reality: '[t]he conflict is real, not played, and it forces him to face the unreality of his dramatic role' (155). Furthermore, she underlines the responsibility of drama in Richard's fractured identity: '[t]he speech resonates with self-reference as Richard's self-searching recognises not only a divided mind torn by guilt but also a

divided figure torn by the dramatic requirements of the history and its form' (155). Consequently, it can be said that, while drama enabled him to dramatically change his circumstances and remove the obstacles in his path, it also deeply affects him and eventually causes his demise.

In conclusion, drama in *Richard III* is presented as a powerful force that allows the cunning Richard to usurp the crown by seducing, manipulating and subjugating other characters. Right at the beginning of the play, Richard establishes a strong connection with the audience in a revealing – but also self-affirming – soliloquy in which he introduces himself as the overarching villain, controlling the strings of other characters and plot alike. He nurtures this relationship through many more asides and soliloquies throughout the play that help create a form of complicity with the audience by giving them access to his thoughts and machinations. This transparency also translates to some of his other interactions, such as that with Anne, where he flaunts his wickedness in a way that proves both attractive and effective. Richard manages to elicit admiration even while displaying his iniquity through his rhetorical power, which allows him to turn his (potential) opponents' arguments on their heads. As such, his mastery of words allows him to control the effect he has on other characters and the reception he will receive in his audience.

Not only does Richard use his rhetoric to affect his intra- and extradiegetic audience, he also directs other characters within the play to appear at a certain time or to act in a certain way, thus functioning as a stage director. He even goes so far as to stage scenes, assigning roles to his supporters and arranging props, script and scenography in advance. Furthermore, he displays a wide range of acting aptitudes and attitudes, from which he is able to choose in order to gain the correct response. The bishop scene in 3.7

constitutes an almost over-stylised metadramatic example of a theatrical representation within a play. In it, Richard demonstrates his dramatic skills and attention to details, as well as his self-awareness in playing a part; as a result, he appears as proficient at self-directing as he is at stage directing.

While his dramatic abilities allow Richard to gain trust, influence and political power, his theatrical self-awareness also enables him to distance himself from the roles he is playing, thus slyly refusing agency for his evil acts. Indeed, instead of seeming good whilst being bad, he insists that he is only 'play[ing] the devil' (1.3.337). Therefore, his own identity becomes so completely hidden behind his masks that the blame loses its target and becomes an illusion as well. Additionally, by blurring the lines between play-acting and what is, he uses drama and seductive illusions as a way to reach selfish, even dangerous, goals. As such, he seems to correspond perfectly to the frightening representation of Machiavel that circulated during the Renaissance and encompassed all the anxieties relating to drama. Therefore, not only does *Richard III* link theatre and evil, but it also suggests theatrics as a tool to avoid blame for the very same evil.

Nevertheless, the play also appears to point to the danger that his excessive use of drama poses to Richard as well as others. Indeed, Richard soon demonstrates a lack of the self-awareness that allowed him such control over his theatrics: the moment he finally reaches his goal of becoming king is when he also starts relying heavily on more unsubtle means of securing his position, such as having his wife murdered and planning to marry his niece. This lack of subtlety is also noticeably conveyed through his sudden loss of rhetorical power. He can no longer depend upon his interlocutor's understanding of half-hidden suggestions and allusions, but must justify his requests with mortifying clarity, as he does when expressing his wish that his nephews be murdered to Buckingham. This

forces him to confront the consequences of his acts without the veil of attractiveness he used to clothe his games in, and without the distance his theatrical masks afforded him. Similarly, Elizabeth forces Richard to face his lack of self-worth until he is compelled to curse himself, prefiguring the thorough self-alienation he endures in the final act.

Both Richard's evanescent identity and his loss of self-awareness thus lead him to a disturbed state of self-alienation. His final soliloquy, provoked by the visit of the ghosts of the characters he murdered, exhibits a number of references to himself as another, questioning his identity and his acts in a spiralling pattern. It offers a stark contrast with Richard's opening soliloquy as he seems to no longer enjoy his complicit relationship with the audience which allowed him the double standing of participant and commentator. Instead, he is alone with his doubts and all out of masks to hide his self-hatred, in a cautionary ending which points to the pitfalls of living a theatrical life to pursue political power.

This rather sombre view of drama could be argued to prefigure — albeit in a rather extreme way — the traps in which Richard II and Bolingbroke will fall, both in *Richard II* and *Henry IV Part 1*. Indeed, Richard II epitomises the danger of a lack of self-awareness and dramatic distance when attempting to maintain one's rule, while Henry IV's Machiavellian use of theatrics to gain power turns out to be the very reason that his reign is considered weak, having revealed the workings of the illusion of power.

CHAPTER 2: *RICHARD II*

Nowhere in his plays does Shakespeare explore contrasting views of kingship as a theatrical role more thoroughly than in *Richard II*. The eponymous protagonist could be said to consider his royal status as the role of his life, thoroughly indivisible from his identity. As a result, he is as much under the illusion projected by the symbols of his part as his audience. Conversely, Bolingbroke epitomises a far more pragmatic view of drama — and kingship —, according to which projecting a certain image is a political tool designed to produce useful illusions for others rather than oneself. These two points of view, applicable both to kingship and drama, were circulating at the time the play was written and performed. On the one hand, kingship and drama could be perceived as emblems of a reality that was believed to have a substantial impact on life, whether good or bad; on the other hand, the appearances produced for the show could be considered deceptive, viewed as an instrument of manipulation and political power — in line with Machiavel's principles.

Richard's character subscribes to the theory of the King's two bodies, a legal conceptualisation of secular royalty based on theology and expounded in Ernst H. Kantorowicz's fundamental study, *The King's Two Bodies*. The scholar identifies *Richard II* as Shakespeare's investigation of the tragic aspects of this theory (26); Kantorowicz thus presents the gradual deterioration of the unicity that supposedly binds the king's body natural (the mortal, human body) and his body politic (the symbolic, divine attributes that are bestowed upon him with the crown) in the three central scenes of the play (3.2, 3.3 and 4.1). The 'duplications' (26) of kingly bodies,[8] which

[8] That is to say, the manifestations which Kantorowicz designates as 'the King, the Fool, and the God' (27).

Kantorowicz observes in Richard as 'all simultaneously active' (27), could be likened to parts that are embodied by the protagonist in his dramatic approach to his kingly status. Richard himself establishes this association when he realises that his own identity has been fractured by the forced dissociation from his symbolic role: '[t]hus play I in one person many people' (5.5.31). Until then, though, Richard strongly believes in the indivisibility of the King's body natural and body politic, seeing at first no difference between them. To Richard, to be one is to represent the other.

Bolingbroke challenges this sacred and absolute view of monarchy by suggesting that his abilities and merits (including, and perhaps significantly, as an actor) count just as much — or even more — in terms of legitimate access to power as Richard's inherited consecration. In legal terms, this brings Bolingbroke's model closer to constitutional monarchy, where the authority of the monarch is validated by a Parliament; in the context of the play, this would correspond to the support of both the majority of nobles and the kingdom's subjects for Bolingbroke. With regard to drama, Bolingbroke could be argued to stand for an approach that is based on the desired effects on the audience rather than on any self-definition in relation to the role. As a result, he also underlines the instability of theatrical ontology, where anyone could become anything provided that they were convincing enough in their part; hence the monarch's status could be considered as unsubstantial.

This is certainly what the Duke of Essex strove to imply when he arranged for *Richard II* to be played at the Globe theatre on the eve of his failed rebellion against Queen Elizabeth in 1601. The potentially subversive ramifications of the play had already been recognised since its debut on the stage, as it was deemed too inflammatory to be printed in its entirety during the Queen's reign (Kantorowicz, 40). Richard Dutton

explains the paradox of leaving in the brutal regicide at the end of the play whilst the deposition scene was censored as a decision based on what could be more 'immediately provocative' (2017, 230): showing a Parliament as having the authority to depose one monarch to ordain a new one, even as the Queen's reign and life was coming to an end without her succession being resolved, was certainly hazardous (*ibid.*). Kantorowicz adds that the political impact of the representation was perceived not only by Essex himself, but also by the judges during his trial. Even Elizabeth I herself famously deplored the number of performances presented in London, as well as related to the tragedy's protagonist in this notorious declaration: 'I am Richard II, know ye not that?' (41). Stephen Greenblatt comments on the involvement of the theatre in public life at the time: 'Shakespeare's theatre was not isolated by its wooden walls, nor was it merely the passive reflector of social and ideological forces that lay entirely outside of it: rather the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre was itself a *social event*' (1994, 32, his emphasis). Consequently, drama seemed to be acknowledged as not only mimicking the world but also producing history in its own right.

Shakespeare, then, appears to play on a twofold perception of both drama and kingship. Richard adopts a dramatic approach to monarchy that is self-referential, only functional within its own narrative frame, feeding on its own performance. In contrast to Richard's method, Bolingbroke's theatrical tactics are rather turned outwards, deployed for their potential impact on people and events. In this chapter, I propose to study these diverging attitudes characterised by Richard and Bolingbroke, as well as the fruits they bear for each of them, while offering an analysis of the strengths and risks in both conceptualisations. Thus, I hope to give a wide-ranging account of Shakespeare's exploration of his medium and its uses as it relates to the performance of royalty.

Richard considers his royal status as a role to perform. In the opening scene, he already establishes a controlled form of language, focused on 'balanced phrasing and […] rhyme' (Van Laan, 117) that highlights the contrast between carefully chosen opposites and images. Another indicator of a manner of speaking intended for effect is Richard's insistence in using the royal first-person plural:

> Then call them to our presence. Face to face
> And frowning brow to brow, ourselves will hear
> The accuser and the accused freely speak.
> High-stomach'd are they both and full of ire,
> In rage, deaf as the sea, hasty as fire. (1.1.15-9)

As Thomas Van Laan remarks, the presence of 'the rare "ourselves"' 'call[s] attention to itself' (117), when the use of the royal 'we' is usually more inconspicuous. Moreover, the synecdochic parallel between '[f]ace to face' and 'brow to brow' creates an emphasis on the pretended equality that Richard promises to establish between the adversaries — which is quickly dispelled as he separates them as '[t]he accuser and the accused'. Richard continues in this ambivalent fashion as he judges them both for the same faults (haughtiness, anger, stubbornness, and precipitation), but also extends the antithesis by comparing them to 'sea' and 'fire'. This allows him to position himself as an impartial judge, removed from these base human emotions and reactions. In this sense, the very inauthenticity of Richard's discourse seems to help him establish his superior role as God-appointed king.

In the very next scene, however, we learn that Richard's position as a disinterested referee is hypocritical and false, as Gaunt denounces him to the Duchess of Gloucester as the man responsible for her husband's death. This retroactively emphasises the theatricality of the first scene (Van Laan, 118) and specifically of Richard's self-presentation. The beginning of the play thus constructs a very histrionic Richard, an

attribute that is distinctly exhibited in Act 3 Scene 2, when he comes back from Ireland and performs a show in front of his courtiers, alternately playing the strong and secure king and the despondent defeatist. Indeed, the scene starts with Richard's grandiose apostrophe to his land, asking it to trip his enemies to defend him, building a metaphorical army of 'earth' and 'stones' (3.2.24) against Bolingbroke's very real soldiers. When Aumerle suggests that these soldiers present a real danger, Richard associates himself with the sun 'rising in our throne, the east' (3.2.50) — while 'Bolingbroke / … hath revelled in the night' — and reminds Aumerle that '[n]ot all the water in the rough rude sea / Can wash the balm off from an anointed king' (3.2.54-5). Up until this point, then, Richard appears to feel thoroughly confident in some godlike power bestowed upon him by his position of monarch of divine right.

After learning from Salisbury that the Welsh warriors have abandoned his cause, however, Richard equates the loss of twenty-thousand soldiers to that of blood, making him look 'pale and dead' (3.2.76), before once again rallying at Aumerle's encouragement to '[r]emember who [he is]' (3.2.82). As a result, Richard returns to a hyperbolic understanding of the authority that his kingship confers on him, thinking that his mere name of King is worth 'twenty thousand names' (3.2.85). Finally, the perceived betrayal of Bushy and Green followed by the news that they were, in fact, beheaded plunges Richard in a state of profound despair, causing him to invite his entourage to 'talk of graves, of worms and epitaphs' (3.2.145). Subsequently, he bemoans the fact that Bolingbroke took everything (summarised in the auxesis 'Our lands, our lives and all', 3.2.151) that he could have bequeathed in a will. The scene then ends in a reversal of the earlier antithesis between Richard and Bolingbroke as day and night respectively to launch a new dynamic '[f]rom Richard's night to Bolingbroke's fair day' (3.2.218). The

expression of these extreme, contrasting emotions in a language that appears studied could suggest a lack of authenticity and the possibility that Richard is acting out rather than feeling these emotions. He thus seems to take pleasure in his own performance and his ability to act tearful or proud at the drop of a hat, like a Greek tragedian swapping masks.

Besides his emotional acting, Richard presents a dramatic perception of the duty of king, which he understands as an array of performative acts. This is conveyed by verbs based on terms relating to monarchy that Richard uses throughout the play. For instance, he describes the actions of a king as 'monarchiz[ing]' (3.2.165). This highlights the active reality of the role of monarch while also underlining the fragility of that performance, which can be dismantled by the end of the 'little scene' (3.2.164), or in other words, death. This impression is emphasised by Richard's use of 'unking' as a verb in the deposition scene; as this verb is employed in the past participle, it suggests a form of passivity, as though the action of 'kinging' or 'unkinging' is out of his control, something imposed upon him. This culminates in the penultimate scene of the play, when Richard expresses his failing grasp on reality, alternating between believing he is 'kinged again, and by and by / Think that [he is] unkinged by Bolingbroke' (5.5.36-7). The progression of these performative verbs throughout the play to measure the role of a king conveys the brittleness of Richard's approach to it as it betrays his gradual loss of agency. Additionally, it points to the fact that he puts too much importance on the performance rather than on the reality of his duty.

Nevertheless, Richard demonstrates a form of surprising awareness when he realises that his time and impact as king are limited to his mortal life. Indeed, in a carnivalesque reversal of status, Richard likens himself to the king's jester, while an

allegoric Death holds court. In this analogy, Death magnanimously allows Richard to entertain him for a moment, an act whose flimsiness the 'Player King' (Barton, 122-6) must understand and accept:

> For within the hollow crown
> That rounds the mortal temples of a king
> Keeps Death his court; and there the antic sits,
> Scoffing his state and grinning at his pomp,
> Allowing him a breath, a little scene,
> To monarchize, be feared and kill with looks,
> Infusing him with self and vain conceit,
> As if this flesh which walls about our life
> Were brass impregnable; and humoured thus,
> Comes at the last and with a little pin
> Bores through his castle wall, and farewell, king! (3.2.160-70)

The 'little play' is regarded with derision by Death, who sees the life of a king as only 'a breath' (164), underlining its futility by suggesting that 'monarchiz[ing]' is only for show: 'kill with looks' (165) could convey some fearsome power, yet together with the rest of the theatrical terms in the passage, it rather highlights that it is a mere illusion. This is then evidenced by the addition of 'self and vain conceit' (166), and confirmed by comparing the king's perceived protection to 'brass impregnable' (168) when it is in fact as frail as a balloon that can be punctured and ruined 'with a little pin' (169). Although this appears to convey Richard's knowledge of the fragility of his position, the fact that he attributes to a personified Death the ability to depose him tends to indicate again his marked preference for an imagined world of stories rather than the one he lives in.

Richard's tendency to focus on storytelling and reflecting on events in terms of metaphors and allegories rather than acting and fighting — anticipating Hamlet in this regard — is manifest in a number of instances. Just before the aborted duel between Bolingbroke and Mowbray, Richard warns his cousin that in the event of his death, '[l]ament we may, but not revenge thee dead' (1.3.58). This is echoed by his entreaty to

his Queen to '[t]ell … the lamentable tale of [him]' (5.1.44) when he is imprisoned, certain that this will 'send the hearers weeping to their beds' (5.1.45). These terms of 'lament', 'tell' and 'tale' all convey the fact that the story and emotional response he can prompt will always outweigh taking action. This is illustrated most clearly upon Richard's return from Ireland, when rather than discussing strategy with his supporters to oppose Bolingbroke's rebellious manoeuvres, he shows a form of defeatism, inadvertently foreshadowing his own demise:

> For God's sake let us sit upon the ground
> And tell sad stories of the death of kings —
> How some have been deposed, some slain in war,
> Some haunted by the ghosts they have deposed,
> Some poisoned by their wives, some sleeping killed —
> All murdered. (3.2.155-60)

Kantorowicz notes that Richard's earlier confidence in 'the indelible character of the king's body politic, god-like' (27), as well as its unity with, and fortifying power on, the natural body, is altered: '[t]he king that "never dies" here has been replaced by the king that always dies' (30). This morbid view of monarchic history may suggest that if Richard cannot control the rest of his performance, he decides to inscribe it in a larger story in order to give it more weight and effect. Thus, the repetition of the word 'deposed' three scenes before his actual deposition almost seems like a form of self-prophecy; in this way, he can give the illusion of weaving the strands of his own fate.

On the one hand, then, Richard's embodiment of the role of king is ultimately fragile, as he puts his focus on the image he projects — or will project after his death — rather than on using his power and theatrical tools to exert political influence and ensure the continuance of his reign. On the other hand, Bolingbroke resorts to theatrical performance as an instrument instead of as an end in itself. James Calderwood comments on Bolingbroke's consideration of 'words as mere vocal conveniences whose substance

lies not in themselves but in what they designate', whereby 'he employs words as promissory notes in gathering followers in his venture for kingship, and reinforces what few words he does utter with material force' (1979, 22). Contrary to Richard, he does not feel as though exploiting the concrete control that drama gives him is below him; therefore, he does not hesitate to capitalise on it for political manipulation and self-serving interest.

Richard highlights this contrast when he criticises Bolingbroke for his callous exploitation of performance in front of his courtiers, accusing him of offering 'his courtship to the common people', commenting on '[h]ow he did seem to dive into their hearts / With humble and familiar courtesy' (1.4.24-6). The emphasis on 'seem[ing]' is subsequently strengthened by Richard describing his attitude as 'the craft of smiles' (1.4.28), thus suggesting both Bolingbroke's lack of sincerity and that he trades in smiles as a political means to an end. Richard then insists on the preposterousness of Bolingbroke bending a 'supple knee' (1.4.33) to people of lesser status, such as 'slaves', 'poor craftsmen', 'an oyster-wench' and 'a brace of draymen' (1.4.27, 28, 31, 32). Bolingbroke's act is made transparent in Richard's double use of the conditional in these two lines: 'As 'twere to banish [the poor craftsmen's] affects with him' (1.4.30) and 'As were our England in reversion his' (1.4.35). Consequently, Bolingbroke can be said to play the role that he knows will win him what he desires.

Nevertheless, one approach does not necessarily prove entirely more efficient than the other. Indeed, Richard keeps theatrical control even in the ostensibly disadvantageous deposition scene, staging it and directing his actor Bolingbroke in such a way that sheds light only on his own performance. However, his previous tendency to self-sabotage downplays his efforts: as remarked above, Richard uses the verb 'depose' no less than

three times within the space of nine lines (3.2.150, 157, 158), well before the deposition scene. He also gives a surprising — and only half-sarcastic — praise of the concept of meritocracy, which contrasts with his notion of royalty as divine right: '[t]hey well deserve to have / That know the strong'st and surest way to get!' (3.3.200-1). He even refers to his cousin as 'King Bolingbroke' (3.3.173), again only partly in jest. Additionally, whilst he had previously claimed that nothing could 'wash the balm off from an anointed king' (3.2.55) and that '[t]he breath of worldly men cannot depose / The deputy elected by the Lord' (3.2.56-7), he ends up stripping himself of all the royal attributes in favour of Bolingbroke: 'With mine own tears I wash away my balm, / With mine own hands I give away my crown, / With mine own tongue deny my sacred state, / With mine own breath release all duteous oaths' (4.1.207-10). This ritualistic anaphora makes use of the very sacredness that kept him above all others and deprives Richard, bit by bit, of all the safeguards and rights in which he used to put all his faith. Therefore, it could be argued that his powerful performance in the deposition scene is already undermined by his own incoherence.

And yet, Bolingbroke's dominance — which was manifest up to that point — is also impaired by this deposition scene; here, he turns out to play the passive puppet to Richard's masterful directing. This is illustrated when Richard compares the crown to a well in which he and Bolingbroke are like buckets alternating in their movements: when one goes down, the other goes up. Richard starts by ordering his uncle, the Duke of York, to '[g]ive [him] the crown' (4.1.181), before playing with Bolingbroke's expectation of receiving it directly: 'Here, cousin, seize the crown. Here, cousin, / On this side my hand, and on that side thine' (4.1.182-3). The following extended metaphor perplexes Bolingbroke, who tries to bring Richard back to the proceedings in one-liners that sound

more and more unsure, in contrast to Richard's continuing rhetorical demonstration. Bolingbroke's first attempt to regain control, 'I thought you had been willing to resign' (4.1.190), is followed by a tentative argument to convince Richard — 'Part of your cares you give me with your crown' (4.1.194) —, before finishing with a desperate question: 'Are you contented to resign the crown?' (4.1.200). Both the lack of balance in the respective number of lines and Bolingbroke's apparent submission to Richard's performance and dramatic choices damage Bolingbroke's image as a powerful leader.

Moreover, Bolingbroke (who, at that point, is already King Henry IV) betrays a form of subscription to Richard's view of himself as the only legitimate king even when the latter is in his control, imprisoned at Pomfret Castle. Thus, his — perhaps offhand — remark in court, 'Have I no friend will rid me of this living fear?' (5.4.2), is reported and interpreted by Exton as '[m]eaning the King at Pomfret' (5.4.10). Exton then takes it upon himself to act to appease his King's fears by murdering Richard. The very fact that Henry is afraid of a 'living' Richard would seem to indicate a feeling of inadequacy and illegitimacy, whereby he cannot consider himself — and be considered — the true king whilst the former king lives. This impossible paradox is reflected in Richard's reaction to Exton's fatal blow: 'Exton, fierce hand / Hath with the *King*'s blood stained the *King*'s own land' (emphasis mine, 5.5.109-10); and even Exton cannot seem to stop himself from referring to Richard as King when carrying his body to Henry: 'This dead King to the living King I'll bear' (5.5.117). This doubling of the royal title suggests that Richard maintains his standing as anointed monarch, even after giving up his crown and his land to Bolingbroke.

Anne Barton even claims that Richard 'becomes once again a true as opposed to a Player King' (126) at the moment of his death and that Henry also sees this murder as

a regicide (which he equates to that of Abel by Cain, 5.6.43), hence his decision to send Exton into exile. Barton then submits that his death paradoxically 'restore[s] Richard to his throne', while Bolingbroke 'find[s] himself in the position of the actor' (126). Therefore, this deed puts Henry in an ambivalent posture, wherein he needed to kill Richard to truly become King whilst this very murder threatens the entire legitimacy of his reign. This, of course, sets the tone for the premise of *Henry IV Part 1*.

Despite Richard's momentary dominance during his own deposition, however, his view of his role as king has significant repercussions on the integrity of his self-perception. Indeed, his tendency to equate his political part with his very identity means that the integrity of his private persona becomes undone once his public role is threatened. This may be illustrated by his use of pronouns to refer to himself, notably in Act 3 Scene 3, when his confidence in the protection conferred by his status begins to dwindle. Thus, his hesitation as to which action to take when facing Bolingbroke at Flint Castle is expressed in a series of questions and answers in the third person singular: 'What must the King do now? Must he submit? / The King shall do it. Must he be deposed? / The King shall be contented. Must he lose / The name of King? I'God's name, let it go' (3.3.143-6). The enjambment in the last two lines, as well as the line-break between questions and answers in the previous lines point to a form of fragmentation; this is then emphasised by the use of the pronoun 'he' which conveys Richard's disassociation from himself.

This is immediately followed by an accumulation of proposed exchanges between all of his royal attributes and those of a much more common man:

> I'll give my jewels for a set of beads,
> My gorgeous palace for a hermitage,
> My gay apparel for an almsman's gown,
> My figured goblets for a dish of wood,

My sceptre for a palmer's walking staff,
My subjects for a pair of carved saints
And my large kingdom for a little grave,
A little, little grave, an obscure grave[.] (3.3.147-54)

The anaphora of the possessive 'my' is balanced in each line with an indefinite article, highlighting the gap between his current privileged position and that of an anonymous, lowly subject. Richard's loss of faith in his status is also reflected in his use of the first person singular in these lines; it could be argued that he is reduced to the condition of a mortal man who only represents himself, whereas he used to incarnate the body politic of the King, the State and God, which was expressed in the royal 'we'. What is more, his notion of himself as 'I' is jeopardised in the deposition scene, when he hesitates in his answer to Bolingbroke's request for the crown: 'Ay, no. No, ay; for I must nothing be. / Therefore, no "no", for I resign to thee. / Now mark me how I will undo myself' (4.1.201-3). In addition to the chiasmus '[a]y, no; no, ay' reflecting his uncertainty, the sound [aI] echoes the first person singular and is combined with repeated negations, suggesting that Richard may have trouble betraying his own identity as King, which has so thoroughly shaped his personality and life.

Another instance in which Richard's ambivalent attitude towards himself is manifest occurs at his return from Ireland. His changeful emotional state in that scene has been discussed above and it is also apparent in his use of the second person pronoun. Thus, when Aumerle tries to boost his confidence by telling him to '[r]emember who [he is]' (3.2.82), Richard reprimands himself: 'I had forgot myself. Am I not king? / Awake, thou coward Majesty, thou sleepest!' (3.2.83-4). This self-address, although it helps him regain some courage, could also be seen as an early sign of self-distancing. This can also be seen in the ambivalent question 'Am I not king?', which both reinforces his rank and puts it in doubt. Therefore, Richard's fluctuating use of the first, second and third person

singular to refer to himself may signal points in the plot when his confidence in who he is and what he represents is shaken.

The depth of Richard's loss of a sense of his own identity following that of his title can be illustrated by the mirror scene which comes immediately after his surrender of the crown. His monologue is peppered with questions that point to his lack of recognition of himself:

> … Was this face the face
> That every day under his household roof
> Did keep ten thousand men? Was this the face
> That like the sun did make beholders wink?
> Is this the face which faced so many follies,
> That was at last outfaced by Bolingbroke? (4.1.281-6)

The echo of the famous line in Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* ('Was this the face that launched a thousand ships[?]', 5.1.91) acts as a forceful reminder of the discrepancy between appearances and reality; here, it conveys a strong sense of disbelief that Richard himself accomplished so much, to be eventually eclipsed by Bolingbroke. Moreover, his distorted sense of self is depicted by the inexact reflection of his face in the mirror (Bolingbroke reminds him that it merely represents 'the *shadow* of [his] face', 4.1.293, emphasis mine), again highlighting the gap between seeming and being and consequently between Richard's profound identity and what is physically left of it after relinquishing the crown. As a matter of fact, Richard pinpoints this disparity by insisting that the 'external manners of laments' (4.1.296) shown in the mirror '[a]re merely shadows to the unseen grief / That swells with silence in the tortured soul' (4.1.297-8). As a result, the mirror scene can be said to illustrate Richard's alienated sense of self following the loss of his role as king.

Richard's dissociative state in the deposition scene may also be noticed when he realises that he is one with the traitors that act against him, as he 'ha[s] given here [his]

soul's consent / T'undeck the pompous body of a king, / Made Glory base and Sovereignty a slave, / Proud Majesty a subject, State a peasant' (4.1.249-52). Kantorowicz also remarks on this self-betrayal that signals the dissociation between the king's two bodies, as 'the king body natural becomes a traitor to the king body politic' (39). Thus, it is not in front of the new 'sun of Bolingbroke' that Richard 'melt[s] [him]self away' (4.1.261-2), but faced with his own reflection in the mirror, which he shatters as a symbol of his demise and the reduction of all his facets, divine and majestic, to the mere physicality of his human body (Kantorowicz, 40). Even though this separation seems deliberate, Richard finds himself divested of his own identity at the same time as his role of king, having likened his individuality to it for so long and so intensely. Consequently, when Northumberland addresses him as '[m]y lord' (4.1.253), Richard reacts forcefully:

> No lord of thine, thou haught insulting man,
> Nor no man's lord! I have no name, no title —
> No, not that name was given me at the font —
> But 'tis usurped. …
> [I] know not now what name to call myself. (4.1.254-9)

The juxtaposition of the negations of both his name and his title highlights the inextricable bond that Richard perceives between the two, to the point that his self-perception is dramatically impacted.

Once Richard is dispossessed of the role of his life, he starts impersonating a variety of parts as though to fill the identity vacuum he finds himself in. This, however, merely hastens the process of self-alienation, as may be evidenced by his last soliloquy. Here, he attempts to build a society to offset the solitude of his cell, with only various abstract parts of himself at his disposal:

> My brain I'll prove the female to my soul,
> My soul the father, and these two beget

A generation of still-breeding thoughts;
And these same thoughts people this little world,
In humours like the people of the world,
For no thought is contented. (5.5.6-11)

Thus, he appears to assemble a small theatre company populated with his thoughts, to which he attributes feelings, opinions and reactions, concluding that he 'play[s] … in one person many people' (5.5.31). His status as king seems to have become as illusory and volatile as a costume that one can put on and off:

… Sometimes am I king;
Then treasons make me wish myself a beggar,
And so I am. Then crushing penury
Persuades me I was better when a king;
Then am I kinged again; and by and any
Think that I am unkinged by Bolingbroke
And straight am nothing. (5.5.32-8)

Anne Barton underlines that his escape 'into an illusory world of his own creation' (125) is signalled by his return to 'the play metaphor' (126), as a form of avoidance of 'the impossible situation of the man who is a king and no king' (*ibid.*). Therefore, Richard belatedly comprehends the deceptive facet of royalty and its guarantees, as well as their link to drama, although it comes at the cost of the integrity of his psyche.

For his part, Bolingbroke, who understood the convenience of playing a role as well as its limits much earlier, is rewarded by his new subjects' — his audience's — approbation. As York recounts the scene to his wife, he compares the new and former kings' arrival in London to a passage on a theatre stage, with contrasting responses:

As in a theatre the eyes of men,
After a well-graced actor leaves the stage,
Are idly bent on him that enters next,
Thinking his prattle to be tedious,
Even so, or with much more contempt, men's eyes,
Did scowl on gentle Richard. (5.2.23-8)

Bolingbroke, then, is considered the better actor of the two, having based his approach to the role on that which would win him the support he sought. Conversely, Richard is reduced to suffer indifference, even spite, from his former subjects while showing real sadness, that 'barbarism itself [would] have pitied' (5.2.36) according to York, 'had not God … steeled / The hearts of men' (5.2.34-5). His show of vulnerability comes too late, however, and he cannot recapture his people's attention. As a result, Bolingbroke can be argued to have overthrown Richard both on the political and the theatrical front.

Nevertheless, the play ends on a more ambiguous note for the new king than York's account could suggest. Indeed, although Henry attempts to bestow the responsibility of Richard's murder on Exton, his own guilt and hypocrisy remain apparent in his last speech:

> They love not poison that do poison need,
> Nor do I thee. Though I did wish him dead,
> I hate the murderer, love him murdered.
> …
> Lords, I protest, my soul is full of woe
> That blood should sprinkle me to make me grow.
> …
> I'll make a voyage to the Holy Land
> To wash this blood off from my guilty hand. (5.6.38-50)

His ambivalence is revealed throughout this passage, as he recognises his 'need' and 'wish' for Richard to be dead. Even his defence that he 'love[s] him murdered' (40) could be interpreted as meaning that Henry actually prefers Richard dead. Similarly, the sadness he claims to feel in the next lines is undermined by the admission that Richard's death will help him 'grow'. Moreover, he appears to put on a theatrical show around Richard's death, insisting that the whole court 'put on sullen black incontinent' (5.6.48) and '[m]arch sadly after' him to 'grace [his] mournings here / In weeping after this untimely bier' (5.6.51-2). His ordering of these rites and a procession might implicate a certain

inauthenticity, especially in combination with the ambivalence highlighted above. Consequently, while Henry finally confesses his guilt and need for atonement, it appears as one more performance he puts on as a means to retain the support of the court.

To conclude, while the people of London might be convinced by and approving of the new Henry IV, the play's audience remains touched by Richard II's flamboyant and delusional performance: he is the eponymous protagonist, and while his method and perspective are not efficient in keeping the power, they are much more fascinating to us. Besides, although Bolingbroke proves the value of theatrics in attaining a position of power, reminding us of Richard III, he also portrays the fickleness of drama; indeed, his reign will be burdened with the weight of his actions against Richard II and his lack of legitimate right to the throne, as is illustrated in Shakespeare's *Henry IV Part 1*. Therefore, both characters once again prove in their own way that the shifting ontology of drama is a precarious means to keep one's power steady and secure.

Richard's approach to kingship as a role to perform appears energetic and powerful, especially as he seems to be just as convinced of his superiority and divine right to the throne as what he would have any of his followers believe. This is evidenced by Richard's studied use of language, which is designed to have an impressive rhetorical effect and marks his perceived loftiness as opposed to those who listen to him. He seemingly takes pleasure in his own performance, to the point where the narrative of it outweighs his actual duties and actions. Thus, when Richard realises that in fact, he does not have control over the current show (a control he attributes to Death), he rather projects on the effect his story will have on people in the future. As a result, the risks of his view of the role of king lie in his betting solely on the power of language and stories building the symbolic aura of the monarch, as well as his own lack of distance from it. Conversely,

Bolingbroke's more pragmatic method allows him to exploit play-acting and the image he projects for political impact, all the while supporting these appearances with the concrete force of soldiers and rebellious moves. This, in turn, wins him the support of the realm and, eventually, the crown.

However, Shakespeare's portrayal of these two approaches is much more nuanced than could be felt when observing the apparently simple reversal of power at the heart of the play. Thus, Richard and Bolingbroke continually exchange their positions of strength with regard to the other: Richard's mastery in histrionics paradoxically culminates in the deposition scene, causing Bolingbroke's own performance to be undermined. Nevertheless, Richard's earlier tendency to give weight to self-sabotaging thoughts and action already weakens the potential impact of his poignant play-acting. In addition, his reliance on the role of monarch as the base for his own identity means that he cannot stand alone when his props are wrenched from him. This is emphasised by the fact that he is the one who acts out his own deposition and the separation of the two bodies of the king, thus furthering the process of self-alienation. In the end, though, despite Bolingbroke's final victory over Richard, acted by the approbation of his audience within the play, the new king's legitimacy is put in question by his half-confessed involvement in Richard's murder. This act can even be said to overturn once again their positions of power, as Henry IV seems bound to recognise the prominence of his predecessor and to rely once again on theatrical show to maintain the good opinion of his followers.

The fact that Shakespeare favours in many of his plays the dramatisation of the stories of kings and particularly of the critical moment of the transfer of power is not surprising: after all, it offers the metadramatic possibility of displaying the point at which an individual dons a different costume, along with various symbolic props, to impersonate

a new role and act accordingly. Incidentally, Richard could also be said to parallel Shakespeare's own undertaking in a metafictional echo, whereby Richard projects himself beyond the span of his own life, defined by the length of the play; and he will actually be talked about in the future, after the representation and indeed for centuries to come as we continue to discuss Shakespeare's play.

CHAPTER 3: *HENRY IV PART 1*

Henry IV Part 1 offers an account of the beginnings of a future ideal king, Henry V. Although the play's title gives the prerogative to his father, King Henry IV, there is no doubt that Prince Hal's trajectory presents a much more fascinating spectacle, especially as he seems to deliberately *make* it a spectacle. His soliloquy in Act 1 Scene 2 proposes a programme for the show to come, explaining to his audience what theatrical tricks he will play in order to impress everyone around him. One may wonder, then, how a character who makes playing — in the sense of dramatic acting as well as having fun — his very identity could be convincing as a future king.

Early modern critics certainly felt that these two apparent opposites did not mix well, condemning the tendency in English drama to blend the genres of comedy and tragedy (Kastan, 2002, 16). These plays were accused of 'mingling kings and clowns' (Sidney, n.d., 114), a sentiment echoed by Joseph Hall in 1597, which David Scott Kastan notes is 'probably the year *1 Henry IV* was first performed' (17). Kastan nevertheless defends the presence of the comic scenes in that they offer a comment on the political action (3). Similarly, Hal could be considered to connect these two facets, using the distance provided by comedy to perform better in a court or epic setting: he displays as much ease when improvising with Falstaff at the tavern as he does when facing his father at court or Hotspur on the battlefield, producing as many faces as the number of situations he finds himself in. David Boyd remarks that 'the "real" Hal is to be found, if found at all, not hidden behind the masks, but rather displayed in them' (16), therefore making his role-playing the very definition of his identity.

In previous chapters, I have shown how perilous that can be: both Richard III and Richard II eventually lose themselves as a result of their histrionics. Besides, Hal's ability to adapt his mask to his needs could recall the stage Machiavel and his successor Richard III. The Prince's Machiavellian side doubtlessly influences one of the common interpretations of his character: after all, he announces his plan at the beginning of the play, just like Richard III[9]. He can thus be considered as a calculating politician, who hides his true self behind a useful deception, which also makes him a worthy descendant of his father Bolingbroke / Henry IV. For instance, Stephen Greenblatt asserts that in the play, '"[t]o be oneself" … means to perform one's part in the scheme of power as opposed to one's natural disposition' (1994, 33), making 'theatricality … one of power's essential modes' rather than its challenger (*ibid*.). A more flattering — if perhaps a little naïve — reading focuses on 'Hal's struggle between the attractive boyishness he must eventually extinguish and the dedicated maturity he must eventually embrace' (Gross, 28). From this perspective, the play follows the character's natural progression from an immature boy to a man apt to fulfil his duties as crown prince and future king.

I would like to suggest here that Hal, as a consummate actor, distinguishes himself not only from these two categorisations, but also from the three kings presented in previous chapters. Greenblatt's implication that Hal might go against his 'natural disposition' in order to 'perform [his] part in the scheme of power' (1994, 33) indeed appears contradictory if one considers that Hal's disposition *is* role-playing in itself. Thus, Hal understands that drama and power go hand in hand and proves that his histrionic nature is what makes him the perfect candidate to perform in a position of power.

[9] It is perhaps important here to distinguish the Machiavelli who wrote *Il Principe* in the early sixteenth century, which detailed his *Machiavellian* code of behaviour for people in power to give off the right sort of image to keep their influence, from the representation that became known on stage as an evil and manipulative dissimulator, Machiavel.

Consequently, Hal cannot be viewed as an immature boy until he accepts his responsibilities, as suggested by Gross, especially as he seems so aware of the image he projects and of the way he will change it from the very beginning of the play.

Hal epitomises the perfect actor and, I would like to argue, the perfect future king as a result. His situation differs from the three kings in *Richard III* and *Richard II* in that he is set to inherit the crown legitimately, rather than trying to obtain it through deception or political calculations. Thus, Hal does not exploit theatrical tools to manipulate others and gain power by force as Richard III does; nor does his political acumen and pragmatic use of drama betray a lack of aura and legitimate foundation in his position of power, as turns out to be the case for Henry IV. Richard II is distinct from these two kings because he is already in place as king at the beginning of the play, which is partly why Hal is compared to him in *Henry IV Part 1*. Yet unlike his father's predecessor, Hal is defined by his adaptability and changeability which protect him from losing himself into one role exclusively. In addition, the fact that he is not yet in place on the throne means that he aims to show his competence for the job at hand, and he does that by demonstrating his skills as an actor.

This demonstration could be said to take the form of three main confrontations against his foils in the play. Indeed, these three characters occupy centre stage in their respective fields: Falstaff is the chief trickster[10] in the tavern, Hotspur epitomises the warrior hero on the battlefield, while Henry is, of course, King at court. Hal will nevertheless win each of their 'crowns' by shaping himself to not only suit these distinct environments but surpass the expectations in each case.

[10] For a survey of the theatrical origins of Falstaff's character, see Calderwood, 1973, 134, and Boyd, 6.

Prince Hal's striking first soliloquy could appear almost as a manifesto for acting as a means to play with people's expectations to one's advantage. Indeed, he announces the manner in which he plans to 'falsify men's hopes' (1.2.201): this, then, can be interpreted as Machiavellian, in the sense in which it was understood at the time, that is, deceptive and manipulative. However, Hal's speech describes the ways in which he will control his own behaviour, rather than others'. Therefore, he might be considered less of a puppeteer or a stage director than he might be an actor. Thus, Hal proposes to shape his image and attitude to create low expectations, which he will then far exceed when he decides to 'throw off' 'this loose behaviour' (1.2.198), comparing this action to that of the sun emerging all the brighter from behind 'the base contagious clouds' (1.2.188). It can be added that his intentions seem to be merely to prove himself worthy of the power that will rightfully become his, as is evidenced by his use of terms such as 'reformation' and 'redeeming' (1.2.203, 207). This forms a stark contrast to Richard III, who uses dramatic tools to obtain power and influence dishonestly, or even to his own father's opportunistic approach.

This soliloquy also foreshadows Hal's uncanny ability to put on any attitude depending on the needs and circumstances like a costume, which he can then just as easily 'throw off' (1.2.198). As a result, the speech could be said to evoke some sort of announcement of Hal's theatrical skills. Thus, he ends his soliloquy by boasting that even bad behaviour can be used to showcase his acting abilities: 'I'll so offend to make offense a skill' (1.2.206). Moreover, his self-comparison with the sun could also be seen as underlining his talent at 'imitat[ing]' (1.2.187), providing that he proves capable of emulating even the sun itself. This, in turn, allows him to 'show more goodly and attract more eyes' (1.2.204), which recalls any good performer's ambition. Hal seems

thoroughly confident in his capacity to incite the reactions he wishes from his audience, be it within the world of the play or even outside of it. Indeed, his introductory claim, 'I know you all, and will a while uphold / The unyoked humor of your idleness' (1.2.185-6), could be addressed *in absentia* to the recently departed patrons of the tavern; yet since Hal is alone on stage, the second-person singular address seems directed to the extra-diegetic audience, both inviting them in his confidence and mocking them for their 'idleness' (1.2.186). This demonstrates his mastery of all the facets of drama, to the point that he is able to play with the fourth wall, suggesting his awareness of a world beyond the frame of the play.

The play that follows this grandiose statement could then be seen as a demonstration of Hal's dramatic skills, which he achieves by showing his superiority in terms of role-playing over his three main foils in the play, starting with Falstaff. The tavern scene indeed offers a long and varied insight into Hal's acting virtuosity, notably in the very metadramatic 'play extempore' (2.4.271), an exercise that is suggested by Falstaff as entertainment. Despite this being proposed quite early in the long scene, Hal only accepts the challenge once he has heard that his father expects him at court the next day, to 'be horribly chid' (2.4.363) according to Falstaff. Hal seems to take his responsibilities as an actor seriously when he accepts to 'practise an answer' (2.4.365), like some sort of rehearsal before the actual dialogue he is to play with his father. Accordingly, he asks Falstaff to 'stand for [his] father and examine upon the particulars of [his] life' (2.4.366-7) and they both arrange themselves, the set and their props to start their performance in earnest. Thus, Falstaff declares that '[t]his chair shall be [his] state, this dagger [his] sceptre and this cushion [his] crown' (2.4.368-9), while Hal, even though he mocks these meagre alternatives to the actual props of kingship, is content to offer

‘[his] leg’ (2.4.378) when he bows in front of his friend made king. All these metadramatic elements signal a conscious shift into a theatrical frame within the play, in which the stakes are quite different for Falstaff from what they are for Hal: Falstaff wants to show off an over-the-top performance to entertain the rest of the tavern patrons and staff, as well as himself, while Hal aspires to display his acting skills and his flexibility in switching roles with perfect ease.

Hal’s ability to switch between, even layer, various parts in an improvised setting such as the ‘play extempore’ is illustrated when he suddenly interrupts the performance to force Falstaff into a role reversal, wherein he now embodies his own father and Falstaff plays Hal’s part. At this point, it could be argued that Hal’s act consists of three roles at once: the first, that he slips into whenever he is at the tavern (that is, his own playful, mischievous self), the second, which consists in mimicking his father, and the third, in which he caricatures Falstaff playing his father. Indeed, Falstaff-as-Henry uses an emphatic, euphuistic style: ‘I do not speak to thee in drink but in tears, not in pleasure but in passion, not in words only but in woes also’ (2.4.404-6). This is then echoed by Hal who also adopts rhetorically ornamental speech, especially when – and it is no coincidence – he is talking about Falstaff: ‘[w]herein is he good, but to taste sack and drink it? … Wherein cunning, but in craft? Wherein crafty, but in villainy? Wherein villainous, but in all things? Wherein worthy, but in nothing?’ (2.4.442-7). Thus, they both speak in antitheses introduced by an anaphora, and both use a figure of repetition of sounds (paronomasia for Falstaff, ‘words’ and ‘woes’, against polyptoton for Hal, ‘villainy’ and ‘villainous’). These similarities only serve to highlight the contrast between their performances, that is, how much Hal surpasses Falstaff as an actor: whilst Falstaff exaggerates to show off his rhetoric and acting skills, he fails by doing just that. Hal

proves he is not only better at imitating his own father ('[d]ost thou speak like a king?' (2.4.421), he asks Falstaff, thus underlining the lack of verisimilitude of his play-acting), but also manages to make fun of Falstaff in the process.

From a symbolical point of view, and as Calderwood observes, Hal can be said to 'uncrow[n] Falstaff … theatrically when he demotes him from a kingly to a merely princely role' (1979, 55), which is confirmed by Falstaff's correct, although humorous, response: '[d]epose me?' (2.4.423). Hal's control in this scene is not interpreted in the same fashion by all critics, however: even though Thomas Van Laan recognises Hal's global superiority in the play he aptly renames 'Who Shall Play the King?' (150), he claims that the Prince 'does not really do any acting' (148) in the 'play extempore', arguing that he only 'plays himself and then his father, the king he is already practicing to become' (*ibid.*). Consequently, Van Laan infers that 'Hal's failure to use the occasion histrionically suggests that he is not fully at home in a world where such activities are characteristic' (149). In this perspective, Hal is only biding his time, playing the one role that is appropriate and useful to him — in correspondence with a more scheming, Machiavellian reading of the character.

However, it may be argued that, in addition to Hal's skilful demonstration of his craft in the play-within-the-play, the Prince displays an innate mastery in role-playing. Indeed, even before the metadramatic frame of the 'play extempore' is put in place, he embodies various personas, adapting them to the circumstances in finds himself in. Act 2 Scene 4 thus starts with Hal boasting about his talent in 'drink[ing] with any tinker in his own language during [his] life' (2.4.18-9), having learned to imitate their vocabulary and attitude. Moreover, after making fun of Francis the drawer's simplistic answers to his own absurd questions, he improvises a short dialogue between Percy and his wife,

alternating between both roles to mock his adversary; these elements show that Hal is quick to joke and play around, perfectly at ease in this provocative and unconventional environment. He is just as confident when talking to the sheriff who comes asking for Falstaff, comfortably switching to verse (when he has been speaking in prose for the rest of the scene) and offering a seemingly responsible and serious response to the request. As a result, Hal can be said to steal the spotlight with his histrionic and chameleonic persona,[11] not only within a consciously established theatrical frame, but at any given moment.

Another striking illustration of the contrast between Hal's and Falstaff's awareness in playing a role is when Falstaff decides to pretend that he is dead at the battle of Shrewsbury to avoid any further danger. He tries to justify his cowardice with a specious argument that 'counterfeit[ing]' (5.4.116) death is 'the true and perfect image of life' (5.4.118) while dying would be the actual counterfeit of life. His playing on words reveals his continued lack of awareness of the consequences of his acting even in these crucial circumstances. This is confirmed when Falstaff decides to stab Percy's corpse to stage a heroic feat that he will falsely claim for himself, exposing the concept of theatrical illusion as he reminds the audience of the fallacy of a stage death, rhetorically asking, 'Why may not he rise as well as I?' (5.4.124-5). Indeed, just as he was an actor embodying the part of a character playing dead and then coming back to life, the actor playing Percy will rise when he is brought off stage (Burckhardt, 147) despite being twice 'killed' on stage. Falstaff increases the threat to the audience's suspension of disbelief as he declares that '[n]othing confutes [him] but eyes, and nobody sees [him]' (5.4.125) (Boyd, 8).

[11] Jonas Barish explores the ambivalent symbolic connotations of both Proteus and the chameleon in the Renaissance, explaining that although these metaphors can have 'invidious' (107) associations, they also became 'positive symbols of man's self-transforming power, rather than emblems of cunning or shallow inconstancy' (109-10).

When compared to Hal's own voluntary breaching of the ontological barrier between the stage and the audience in his first soliloquy, Falstaff's metadramatic remark rather underlines a complete absence of understanding of these ontological levels and his definite confinement within the boundaries of the play.

Hal's foil in the competition for the role of hero and valorous soldier is Hotspur. Despite only meeting him in the last act, Hal is already set against his contemporary by the King in the very first scene, when Henry bemoans the fact that his son was not exchanged at birth for the more impressive Percy (1.1.85-8). The climactic battle of Shrewsbury proves an apt stage for the Prince not only to confirm his superiority over Falstaff, as demonstrated above, but also to establish dominance over 'this Hotspur, Mars in swaddling-clothes' (3.2.112),[12] who is also described by the King as 'the theme of honour's tongue' (1.1.80). As a matter of fact, the Prince defeats Henry Percy on both counts. Hal famously turns out to be the better fighter as he kills Percy at Shrewsbury, and even before this takes place, he is already considered the worthier of the two, at least by Sir Richard Vernon who admiringly reports Hal's proposition to meet Hotspur in single fight:

> … I never in my life
> Did hear a challenge urged more modestly[.]
> …
> He gave you all the duties of a man,
> Trimmed up your praises *with a princely tongue*,
> …
> Making you ever better than his praise
> By still dispraising praise valued with you;
> And, *which became him like a prince* indeed,
> He made a blushing cital of himself.
> (5.2.51-61, emphases mine)

[12] Despite the apparent condescension in the King's description of Hotspur, he actually wishes to highlight the martial successes of Percy for all his youth, in contrast to Hal who is the same age in the play.

This commendation of Hal's character, as it comes from an exterior eye and, what is more, from Hotspur's own kinsman, corroborates Hal's own statement of intent in his soliloquy at the beginning of the play and gives it more weight. Indeed, Vernon cannot be said to be partial to Hal and yet, as David Boyd remarks, he 'hints that Hal looks the part, and sounds the part, more successfully than Hotspur; and in the theatrical/political world of *Henry IV Part 1*, appearances count. So much so, in fact, that the actual combat is almost an anti-climax, the confirmation of a foregone conclusion' (10). Even Hotspur himself admits that he 'ha[s] not well the gift of tongue' (5.3.77) and that the only 'courtesy' he knows must make Hal 'shrink' (5.2.74) under its blows, which only serves to highlight Hal's generosity and modesty by contrast. Hal's oratory skills therefore seem to reflect his valour and humility, which are 'princely' qualities heralding his competence as a future king.

Consequently, Hal eclipses Hotspur's performance as a hero, by mastering both the gestures and the text of the part. He even wears the right costume: he is described as 'gallantly armed' (4.1.104), looking like 'a feathered Mercury' (4.1.105), by the same Vernon who later admires his speech. Nevertheless, he does not appear dressed up, which constitutes his greatest success as an actor: Vernon relates that he is 'vaulted *with such ease* into his seat / As if an angel dropped down from the clouds / To turn and wind a fiery Pegasus / And witch the world with noble horsemanship' (4.1.106-9, emphasis mine). Grace, which he woefully lacked earlier in the play (even according to himself when playing his father and calling Falstaff-as-Hal an 'ungracious boy' (2.4.433)), now seems to come to him naturally. It could even be said to come from a divine source, as Vernon compares him to Mercury and an angel, and his horse to Pegasus, thus giving Hal a higher stand from which to approach his duel with Hotspur. As a result, it is with

confidence that he meets Hotspur in battle to (re-)claim what is rightfully his: 'I am the Prince of Wales, and think not, Percy, / To share with me in glory any more' (5.4.62-3). After 'depos[ing]' (2.4.423) Falstaff in the 'play extempore', he robs Hotspur of his ambition to reign in his stead.

Once Hal has not only proven his mastery of the script and the costume for the part of the hero, but also his worthy skills in combat, he once again displays his leading ability in dialogue when he robs Hotspur of his last words.

HOTSPUR … O, I could prophesy,
But that the earthy and cold hand of death
Lies on my tongue. No, Percy, thou art dust
And food for — [*He dies.*]
PRINCE For worms, brave Percy. (5.4.82-86)

Oliver Morgan notes that since we do not have any indication — except of editorial nature — of the exact moment of Hotspur's death, Hal's completion of his rival's line could be just that, a completion. Alternatively, it could be that Hotspur interrupts himself (by dying or simply not finishing his thought), or that he is interrupted by Hal (174). The fact remains that Hal takes this opportunity to deliver the *bon mot* himself, thereby reclaiming the attention at a moment when Percy was centred on himself, as is evidenced by his use of self-address in the second-person pronoun. Hal's intrusion in Percy's line is also marked by the contrast between Hotspur's rare foray into more abstract and poetic speech on life and time with the decidedly prosaic return to the reality of death and its aftermath. Consequently, Hal could be said to force Hotspur down both physically and rhetorically.

Hal's last and most important foil, when considering the stakes of succession, is his own father. He must not only give him evidence of his political worth as crown prince, but also of his mastery of the dramatic skills which Henry used so efficiently to gain access to Richard II's throne. Nevertheless, as this is precisely what weakened Henry's

claim to the throne and, I suggest, what strengthens Hal's, it can be argued that the Prince actually surpasses his father both politically and dramatically. Indeed, the King's method of obtaining support, and eventually, the crown, is part of the grievances listed by Hotspur to justify rebelling against him: 'by this face, / This *seeming* brow of justice, did he win / The hearts of all that he did angle for' (4.3.82-4, emphasis mine). Here, Percy underlines the manipulative aspect of Henry's theatrics, and the mistrust it instilled in those whose support had been crucial during his campaign to overthrow Richard. As a result, the rebels are led 'to pry / Into his title, the which [they] find / Too indirect for long continuance' (4.3.103-5). Henry's recourse to dramatic tools, although effective, has thus diminished the meaning of the role of king.

Hal must then rehabilitate the legitimacy of his bloodline on the throne, as well as the profound meaning behind the royal function. Calderwood points out that the transfer of Richard's title to Henry is accompanied by a loss of integrity in 'the relation between words and things', which becomes 'arbitrary, unsure and ephemeral' (1979, 6). Consequently, Calderwood suggests that Shakespeare himself might seem like a 'liar, now that truth, meaning, and value are no longer naturally resident in words. Thus he and Hal, the interior dramatist, begin their plays as seeming liars and seek to transcend the fallen, lie-fraught world of Henry IV by restoring value and meaning both to kingship and to the King's English' (*ibid.*). This Hal promises to undertake by vowing to reclaim his title of son to the King: 'I shall hereafter, my thrice-gracious lord, / Be more myself' (3.2.92-3). When this assurance is unheeded by Henry, who still considers him 'the shadow of succession' (3.2.99), as opposed to Percy who 'hath more worthy interest to the state' (3.2.98), Hal makes a new commitment: 'I will redeem all this on Percy's head / And in the closing of some glorious day / Be bold to tell you that I am your son' (3.2.132-

4). Hal therefore announces his intention to give substance and significance anew to the role that was thrust upon him at birth by making his attitude and deeds match who he is.

From this perspective, Hal already trumps his father in terms of legitimate claim to the throne: he will obtain the crown by direct succession, rather than the unsavoury process of deposition (or forced abdication) that formed Henry's path to power. The King himself likens his son to Richard II, while he compares himself to Percy in an analogy that aims at inspiring fear of a successful rebellion in Hal: '[f]or all the world, / As thou art to this hour was Richard then, / When I from France set foot at Ravenspur, / And even as I was then is Percy now' (3.2.93-6). However, it also highlights Henry's own previous role as the opponent to the legitimate king, while Hal will rightfully claim the throne in the future (Boyd, 11). In this respect, Hal does not *need* to play a part to become who he is destined to be, unlike his father, but he understands the necessity of it and, most importantly, the way in which to wield it in order to hold the intricate illusion of power.

Henry does not realise this, as he attempts to give Hal a lesson in political posturing. Indeed, he describes his dramatic tactics as offering his appearance sparingly and when he did appear, as presenting himself 'dressed … in such humility / That [he] did pluck allegiance from men's hearts / … Even in the presence of the crowned King'. He explains that, in this way, he 'ke[pt] [his] person fresh and new' (3.2.51-5). Conversely, he compares his son's attitude to that of Richard, who 'ambled up and down / With shallow jesters and rash bavin wits' and 'carded his state' by '[m]ingl[ing] his royalty with cap'ring fools' (3.2.60-3). Unwittingly, however, he underlines the similarity of his and Hal's goals (albeit with clashing methods) by using a celestial comparison that recalls his son's first soliloquy: '[b]y being seldom seen, I could not stir / But, like a comet, I was wondered at, / That men would tell their children "This is he!"' (3.2.46-8).

Hal, of course, plans on being so often 'seen', and in such a provocative way, that 'when he please again to be himself, / Being wanted, he may be more wondered at' (1.2.190-1), like the sun that finally emerges from behind the clouds. Therefore, Henry berates his son for behaving like Richard II who is associated with 'the imagery of the Player King' (Barton, 128), not realising that Hal has in fact chosen to embrace this type of performance so as to better control it.

Hal confirms at Shrewsbury that he obtains better results from counterfeiting than his father. As illustrated above, Hal's embodiment of the hero is perfectly convincing and sparks admiration of his noble and princely behaviour, which prefigures his aptness at playing the role of monarch later on. This offers a stark contrast to Henry, who elects to hide his status behind an illusory trick in order to continue reigning: he offers up decoys of himself, impersonated by his courtiers, so as to avoid confrontation as much as possible. Thus, whilst Hal's use of counterfeit makes him look more powerful and dignified, Henry's makes him seem more cowardly and banal. This is conveyed when a bewildered Douglas shouts '[a]nother king!' (5.4.24), while he betrays his growing indifference to whether the person he kills is, indeed, the King: 'whoe'er thou be / … I win thee' (5.4.36-7). On the whole, then, Shrewsbury can be argued to be the locus where Hal substantiates his claim to the three crowns he already won against Falstaff, Hotspur and his father for his superior incarnation of the roles they embodied: the trickster, the hero and the King.

In conclusion, Hal succeeds at demonstrating not only that his acting skills surpass those of his three main adversaries in the play, but also that these very skills are what will make him an ideal king in the future. He starts the play strongly by announcing how he plans to act his part in order to inspire misleading assumptions about him, also taking this

opportunity to advertise his dramatic abilities. He does so by addressing the audience directly, which conveys his dexterity in playing with ontological layers, as it underlines his awareness of the flimsiness — and the importance — of illusion. He could thus be said to extend his influence beyond the confines of the play, which places him in a position of power from the very beginning. The fact that he then follows through with his plan as the play progresses shows that he is unexpectedly steadfast and coherent in his actions, which bodes well for his future role as king.

Hal's first 'test' occurs at the tavern, where he is set to face his old friend Falstaff in a 'play extempore' that offers a stark contrast of their histrionic talent. Here, Hal confirms what he declared in his first soliloquy, that is, that he is a capable actor. The scene thus gives evidence of his deftness at improvising various roles and having quick-witted fun in accordance with the setting, as well as suggests how seriously he considers play-acting when he agrees to rehearse the important scene of the confrontation with his father before it happens. In addition, Hal underlines his superiority over Falstaff when he uses the occasion as an excuse to mock his friend's own play-acting. As a result, Hal's multi-layered performance shows his awareness of the stakes within the 'play extempore' and its consequences on the world outside of the tavern, whereas Falstaff plays only for the entertaining value of it.

Hal also belies expectations based on his 'madcap' (1.2.135) self by easily cloaking himself in the costume of warrior hero at the battle of Shrewsbury. Not only does he wear the attire well, boasting a decidedly princely, even divine, appearance, but he also demonstrates his knowledge of the script and gestures. Indeed, he beats the valorous and honourable Hotspur both rhetorically and physically. In the end, he even

wins Percy's last words, illustrating once more his sharp wit and ability to control any interaction.

Finally, Hal proves that he is one step ahead of his father both in his understanding of the political use of dramatic tools and of the value he can bring back to the monarchy. The confrontation scene in 3.2 should be about the King putting his son down as he finds him lacking in his duties and political acumen when in fact, it reveals the opposite. Henry unwittingly highlights the similarities between his and his son's goals in playing with appearances, as well as betrays his own insecurities as a former opponent to royal authority. Hal, by contrast, is legitimated by his lineage and works to rebuild its reputation and ascendancy by proving he can play the role of crown prince, son to the King and valiant fighter, with perfect ease. All in all, then, Hal can be said to win the three metaphorical crowns of his theatrical foils, thereby aptly establishing him as an accomplished actor and perfect future king.

CONCLUSION

In *Richard III*, *Richard II* and *Henry IV Part 1*, Shakespeare offers a twofold reflection. On the one hand, he employs metadrama to meditate on his own medium (as he is wont to do in other plays as well) and on the way it functions, what it allows one to do or become, as well as its potential pitfalls. On the other hand, these plays highlight moments of transition in power, allowing him to contemplate how characters reach a position of kingship and / or attempt to maintain it. The connection between these two elements becomes clear when one considers that the moment when a character becomes King can be likened to an actor taking up a new role. These plays can therefore be argued to shed light on the relationship between power and drama. Indeed, both work on a basis of illusion-making and playing a role to convince an audience, be it in the theatre or in the realm. Shakespeare thus appears to propose that drama is a powerful tool to construct monarchy, by presenting future kings as skilful actors.

Richard III and Bolingbroke both illustrate this by successfully performing themselves into power. Richard III thus exploits the potential of theatrics as a way to manipulate situations and other characters so that he obtains their — sometimes unwilling — support. This behaviour, reminiscent of the stage Machiavel, is amplified by his ability to displace the blame from himself, insisting that he is only *playing* the villain: his dramatic distance allows him to erect a veil of illusion between himself and the consequences of his actions. Bolingbroke's use of drama can also be said to evoke Machiavellian techniques, but in a more subtle, political fashion. Thus, his goals are far less nefarious that Richard's; yet he demonstrates a pragmatic understanding of the power of appearances, which he uses to his advantage to gather support against Richard II.

However, both Richard III and Henry IV add a layer of complexity to this seemingly omnipotent conceptualisation of drama as they fail to keep their royal authority once on the throne. Their performing selves then become a disadvantage: they interpret this part as exclusive of all others in an attempt to give stability to a position they have reached through their versatility as actors. As a result, Richard III cannot adapt to the new demands of the part and loses the self-awareness that allowed him such dramatic control and starts relying on much more unsubtle means, such as murder and incest, to attempt to maintain his seat on the throne. This causes a wave of uncharacteristic guilt, symbolised by the ghosts' visit to him on the eve of battle, and a descent into a self-alienating spiral. In the case of Henry IV, his recourse to dramatic means to attain power weakens his status as king because it gives room to suspicions of manipulation and opportunism amongst his former supporters, who then turn against him. Therefore, whilst Richard III and Bolingbroke both illustrate the potency of drama in a bid for power, they struggle to reconcile their Machiavellian ways with what they perceive is needed in their new position as monarchs. This may be said to offer a rather ambiguous view of the theatre and its uses in politics.

Richard II distinguishes himself from Richard III and Henry IV in that he is already an established and legitimate king at the beginning of the eponymous play. He is nevertheless affiliated with these actor-kings as he embodies the role of monarch histrionically, giving a flamboyant, albeit deluded, performance. His lack of distance to the part that he considers unique and intrinsically linked to his own identity thus implies that he fails to adapt his interpretation to confront an actor with a thoroughly different acting style. Bolingbroke, as mentioned above, has a highly pragmatic and material approach both to their dramatic and political opposition, showing his ability to fit various

types of expectations so as to gain support, whereas Richard II remains deeply rooted in his abstract and sacred notion of royalty. Consequently, he proves incapable of playing opposite his foil in this new context and ends up losing to him.

Contrary to these three kings, Hal chooses to embrace his role as Player King (Barton, 128-9) rather than laboriously trying to compensate for it, viewing it as a strength instead of a weakness. By accepting that power is an illusion in itself, he takes control of it and paradoxically manages to give it substance. Simultaneously, he succeeds in keeping a dramatic distance, which the others failed to do; this allows him not only to play the part convincingly to guarantee the continuance of the illusion, but also to play *with* it while keeping control over it. Indeed, Hal is defined by his versatility as an actor; yet he demonstrates that he can be changeful without proving unstable, thereby surpassing all three other kings and suggesting that he will be an ideal king thanks to his acting skills.

Shakespeare therefore appears to celebrate the infinite possibilities and mobility that drama offers by displaying its transformative power. At the same time, however, his plays hold a warning that it is necessary to remain aware of the illusion as it is constructed; we, as an audience, are constantly reminded of that by the numerous instances of metadrama. Nevertheless, this never happens at the cost of a willing suspension of disbelief. To the contrary, it could be argued that it makes the theatrical illusion even more impressive, as it can fluctuate within changing ontological layers and nonetheless remain compelling.

These plays invite the comparison between a dramatic performance and that of kingship. Similarly to the workings of theatrical illusions, the king must play his part with enough conviction so as to keep his audience captive, whilst understanding that his

authority is based on a collective illusion. It is perhaps to pursue this reflection that Shakespeare shows us future kings who are outstanding actors.

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