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Contents

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"Breath of Kings": Political and Theatrical Power in *Richard II*

Abstract

This essay challenges the way in which *Richard II* has been perceived and portrayed in recent films and theatrical adaptations and in literary criticism since Coleridge. It bases its research on experimental productions by Anərkē Shakespeare, using original practice techniques without a director, relying solely on the text rather than external conceptual impositions. Scrutinising Richard's language as both an embodiment of performance, and embodied in performance, obviates received caricatures of Richard as weak, effeminate, gay, and capricious. It uses J.L. Austin's analysis of perlocutionary and illocutionary performatives to show the degree to which Richard's illocutionary fragility, as he loses political power at a local level, develops a perlocutionary strength in which he demonstrates unexpected performative capacities. It argues that political power and theatrical power in the play are inversely proportional to each other. Consequently, as Richard gains theatrical power he achieves a far greater political force beyond the confines of the play. In the only soliloquy, Richard appeals directly to a universal need to accept our common state of nothingness: "whate'er I be, / Nor I nor any man that but man is / With nothing shall be pleased till he be eased / With being nothing". Revealing only then that we can be something.

Keywords: Theatrical power; political power; J.L. Austin; perlocutionary and illocutionary acts; performatives; stereotypes; directorless; *Richard II*; Shakespeare; deposition; hollow crown; nothing; chiasmus, grief

What do we know of Shakespeare's King *Richard II*? Are we acquainted with him as a poetic king – a capricious, gay, effeminate, ineffectual ruler (as if being gay and effeminate equates to being weak), who is deposed by the hirsute and manly Bolingbroke?[1] We are familiar with the Royal Shake-

[1] The *Guardian* theatre critic, Michael Billington, confirms this tendency in an article that claims that John Barton's use of actors in alternating the roles works against the stereotype: "John Barton in 1973 had the brilliant idea of getting Ian Richardson and Richard Pasco to alternate as Richard and Bolingbroke: *in place of the usual conflict be-*

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speare Company (RSC) David Tennent's near caricature of a homosexual, childlike and ethereal Richard, his gay councillors whispering worm-tongue in his ear (Doran 2014). We are struck by Ben Wishaw's reincarnation of Michael Jackson, complete with pet monkey,[2] as the otherworldy, Christlike figure of poetic melancholy and homosexual longings, crucified in the brutal world of a masculine politics (Goold et al. 2012). We remember Fiona Shaw's angelic Richard, delicate, teary and in love with Bolingbroke (Goold, Richard Eyre and Thea Sharrock 2012).

But when we turn our attention to the text, what remain of these inherited archetypes? Can we really call Richard capricious? And what of his supposed homosexuality in the face of the "moving farewell" with his wife, in shared lines and rhyming couplets.[3] Is Richard, who has ruled for twenty-two years at the time of his deposition (June 1377 to September 1399), really an ineffectual king?[4]

These questions stem from a series of experimental performances of *Richard II* by Anərkē Shakespeare, working without a director, in a democratic ensemble, relying solely on the text rather than external conceptual impositions. Rather than being arbitrarily capricious[5] we discover Rich-

tween a winsome dandy and a burly pragmatist, one suddenly got a study of parallel misfortune" (emphasis added). This doesn't prevent Billington from endorsing Rupert Goold's "stunning" 2012 *Richard* (with Ben Wishaw as a thoroughly gay, effete Richard) as "best of all" (2014). See also *The Guardian* theatre blog: "Fragility has very much been the key to the Richards of our day, such as Eddie Redmayne's performance at the Donmar in 2011. Redmayne's king was painfully young and gauche". https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2013/jan/24/richard-ii-actors-david-tennant (Accessed 18 October 2018).

[2] "Wanted to do a Michael Jackson themed RII and the monkey (King Richard had a pet monkey) is a tribute to that": Goold 2012.

[3] This is an unhistorical invention, Richard being then married to the French king's daughter Isabel who was seven. Saccio 1977: 22.

[4] A discussion of Mark Rylance's Richard at the Globe, 2003, encapsulates this concern: "Why is Richard II always portrayed as an effeminate weekling (sic)? Is there anything in the play itself that suggests he was either weak or effeminate? Nothing that I can find", writes Stephen Yourke. The response by Maxie Smith is not couched in any academic register, and is all the more striking for its inconsiderate prejudice: "He was literally basically your stereotypical flamboyant gay guy and did not give two shits about ruling. Combine this with also very strongly believing in the divine right of kings and having absolutely no doubt that this was where he was meant to be and he could do no wrong regardless of how much of a shitshow the country was, you wind up with a pretty shit ruler who also happens to be quite effeminate": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-rAYmmIYCGQ&index=2&list=PLB7544A25CC61FCD6 (Accessed 18 October 2018).

[5] The most famous early author of this judgement is S.T. Coleridge, who writes consistently of Richard's "insincerity, partiality, arbitrariness, and favouritism" (1930: 153).

ard is beholden to political advisors in a complicated system of factions and alignments and manoeuvrings for power that, historically, had surrounded Richard for twenty years. The one reference to Richard's homosexuality occurs at the execution of Green and Bushy when Bolingbroke, hardly a disinterested party, unfolds some causes of their deaths to wash the blood from his hands, sodomy being the only capital crime he lists. To bias the audience to believe this accusation, productions must ignore the sympathetic relationship between the Queen and the accused, and cut the lines or underplay the romance in the parting love scene between the King and Queen.[6] Richard speaking poetic verse does not make him a "poetic king", with its connotations of pragmatic weakness and abstract fantasy. Richard in action goes in person to the war in Ireland. He is engaged in battles and political machinations. He violently resists his assassins. We challenge the binary notion of Richard as poetical king and Bolingbrook as a silent, manly soldier. Our argument is based to a large degree on our experience of embodying the text – working from the inside out rather than the outside in – which changed our own positions in an early draft of this work, as we re-discovered the text in performance, as if for the first time. This experience led us to ask questions about the nature of power in *Richard II*: its distribution, its qualities, its transforming and transformative nature.

Richard II is Shakespeare's most metatheatrical King. This is expressed by his play between shadow and substance in the deposition scene, and by the performative nature of his language in and out of office. The image of political theatricality is consecrated by York's description of the deposed Richard as an unapplauded actor following the great performance of Bolingbroke.[7] But a failed actor in office, he becomes a consummate actor in failure. In his naked vulnerability as everyman he finally wields the greatest power an actor can have inside a theatrical performance: the power of complete sympathy and identification from the audience.

The power of language and the language of power in *Richard II*, and its relationship to the theatrical and political power of the character who uses such language, are, as in many other Shakespeare plays, inversely proportional to each other. When Richard appears to exercise the greatest political power through the performative authority of language as king, he is weakest in theatrical terms. And when he has lost this performative power to change his political world, he is invested with a new theatrical and po-

[6] See: RSC *Richard II*, dir. Gregory Doran (2013); *The Hollow Crown: Richard II*, dir. Rupert Goold (2012); Shakespeare's Globe, *Richard II*, dir. Tim Carroll (2003); National Theatre *Richard II*, dir. Deborah Warner (1995).

[7] "As in a theater 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." (1.2.25-30).

etical power that, affecting change in the audience, has the capacity to influence a world beyond the confines of the play. For it is not kingship as an institution of political power that gives Shakespeare's characters theatrical potency. It is rather the loss of that power. Time and again speeches and moments that are most memorable, the ones we quote, fixate on, write endlessly about, recall in our retellings of the play, and which shake us to the very core, tend to be when the characters are at their most vulnerable.

A signal example is Macbeth's speech, "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" (*Macbeth*, 5.5.22), spoken when he has lost his wife and is about to lose his kingdom. He speaks for the first time without ambition or artifice, finding in self-acceptance a new awareness, and in the depth of his loneliness creating community with the audience, joined in the predicament of being poor players on the stage of life, creeping towards dusty death. We see this in the figure of Lady Macbeth, in her nightgown, wailing from a heart sorely charged; Cleopatra, on her death bed, laying aside her temporal power; Hamlet unable to take up the name of action; Claudius alone on stage trying vainly to pray for forgiveness; Lear in the storm giving Poor Tom precedence to enter shelter; Henry V doffing his kingly attire, walking like a shadow amongst his men; Coriolanus sacrificing his life for his family and Prospero's epilogue appealing to a common need for release and pardon, through the recognition of his loss of power.

Richard begins as a king, whose empty rhyming couplets querulously insisting that he should be unquestionably obeyed by his ordained power as God on earth, make us almost willing to see him deposed. Bolingbroke in contrast captivates with status and theatrical power, dominating much of the first half of the play during Richard's absence in Ireland. He speaks brave and lyrical verses, displays the courage of a soldier, and shows astute political acumen. And yet something shifts when the crown is handed to Bolingbroke. This chiasmus is the turning-point of the play, the hinging point, the see-saw that tips its balance structurally, poetically and visually as two men and two simultaneous kings hold the crown between them. The hollow crown that lies at the centre is a stage where death "the antic" sits and holds his court, and a deep well that will fill one bucket and empty another. One will take the crown and the other fall – the one bucket dancing in the air, the other down and full of tears. And yet, in losing everything, Richard takes up something he has lacked until then. The sympathy of the audience. Devoid of political power and temporal kingship he becomes another kind of king.[8]

[8] "One of the great joys of playing this play is how the sympathies shift. It's quite hard to sympathise with Richard initially, perhaps it needs a bit of persuading that he is the right king at the right time and yet as the play unfolds, Bolingbroke, who in some

But how is this done? How are we transformed to empathise with a man who takes full command of language and the stage – a man who embodies both the "infinite faculties" of humanity and its ultimate reduction to a "quintessence of dust"?

Richard II is written entirely in verse, a rare case in Shakespeare's canon. This does not mean that the figured language is inaccessible and archaic. Shakespeare plays different uses of the verse against each other to particular theatrical effect and development of character. At times, the language seems so natural that it appears prose-like. At others he heightens the verse form making it self-consciously formulaic and artificial. This is notable in the early use – as mentioned above – of Richard's innumerable, often too pat, rhyming couplets that empty the language of power.

The play of power and weakness is especially evident in the performative speech acts in the first and the third scenes, what the philosopher J.L. Austin called illocutionary performatives. Illocutionary acts are the uses of language that do not describe but rather change things in the world. They transform relationships through the exercise of power inherent in language – a combination of linguistic and social convention that is embedded in a particular set of social and historical relations.

In the first and third scenes the king occupies the centre of an elaborate ceremony of power, primarily through public illocutionary acts that are designed to display and exercise the authority of his word and settle in relatively impersonal, objective ways, disputes between his subjects. But the ringing of rhyming couplets, his entreaties for obedience behind the hollow threat of command, and the transformation of the outcome, all indicate the king's unspoken complicity in the guilt of Gloucester's murder and his inability to control those who have the capacity to expose it.

Bolingbroke and Mowbray exercise their conventional rights of public challenge to air and prove their charges of treason against each other. The charge of treason is itself a product of ceremony. It is brought into being by the social and politically endowed concept of royal sovereignty, and in the medieval world of *Richard II* it is extended in formal ritual through practices. The two scenes are saturated with examples of such ritualistic illocutionary speech acts in the accusations, the challenges, the throwing down

ways has been the avenging hero, becomes a slightly more ambiguous character; Richard certainly gains some kind of redemption, I think, in the eyes of the audience, and I think, as ever with Shakespeare, one of the great joys of his work is that he presents people for who they are and he doesn't judge them for who they are, and that, I think, is part of what makes his plays live on . . . he presents them in all their glory and all their ambiguity of morality that runs through every one of us. In this play he takes us on an unpredictable journey of allegiances which is part of what I think makes this such a masterpiece." (David Tennent, "Interview", in Doran 2014).

of gages, the royal commands. These formal challenges form an arena for the display of the power of the king's word. He is empowered by his position and the ceremony of the occasion to demand responses from the antagonists, decide how the dispute will be settled, and, in the end, controversially, to interrupt the settled way of deciding the dispute through combat, by banishing both the antagonists. But they also register the limits of a king's power of speech. It is undercut by conflicting crosscurrents: he cannot, for example, compel the antagonists to pick up their gages, withdraw their accusations, or be friends. And even when he attempts to assert the authority of his word, he in fact signals its impotence:

> We were not born to sue, but to command,
> Which, since we cannot do, to make you friends,
> Be ready, as your lives shall answer it,
> At Coventry upon Saint Lambert's day.
> (1.1.202-5)

Richard qualifies the limitations of his power – he cannot make them friends – but the caesura between "Which, we cannot do" and "to make you friends", suggests that he cannot command at all, and presages his final loss of command. Mowbray reminds him of further limits of his power when, in response to the collected force of the king's imperative, "Norfolk, throw down, we bid; there is no boot", he declares, "My life thou shalt command, but not my shame" (1.1.171).

The most pointed reminder of the absolute limits of the power of the "breath of kings" comes in Gaunt's sharp rejoinder that while Richard may have the power to take or curtail life, he has none to give it or extend it:

> King Richard Why, uncle, thou hast many years to live.
> Gaunt But not a minute, king, that thou canst give.
> (1.3.231-2)

In the public show of royal illocutionary force, we are made aware of the fragility of the theatre of power that Richard inhabits. Richard as king cannot effect any change in the hearts of men, and he has no power over death.

A reprisal of the opening confrontation between Mowbray and Bolingbroke occurs at the opening of the deposition scene, with a flurry of farcical interchanges, mocking the illocutionary act of throwing down a gage. The scene begins in seriousness and soon escalates to the point of absurdity as gages are thrown down left, right and centre in acts of comic, self-righteous anger. The court ritual has turned into a circus performance. This not only casts our mind back to the first scene in which the stately perfor-

mance is contained by solemn ritual and ceremony, but also sets up the theatrical extravagance of the deposition scene to follow.

This scene is the chiasmus or hinge on which political power is transferred to Bolingbroke through the external symbols of crown, gown, and sceptre. But here Richard, having lost his regal illocutionary power, begins to command his theatrical power. Appearing in front of the assembly, already referring to Bolingbroke as "king", Richard asks: "To do what service am I sent for hither?" (4.1.185). This sets the scene for Richard as performer. What is Richard's new function, as functionary of the state? And what role does he now have as the agent of the transfer of power to the new king? The idea of service also invokes the performative function of the actor or players, who were always servants – the 'men' of an aristocrat, king or queen.

Richard is aware of the performative function that he must play in this charade. York then casts him in his role. He gives him his lines, his motivation, his back story, and the desire of his audience for Richard to readily participate in the performative undoing of himself.

> To do that office of thine own good will
> Which tired majesty did make thee offer:
> The resignation of thy state and crown
> To Henry Bolingbroke.
> (177-80)

Richard must now publicly declare his *willingness* to resign the crown and that his had been the idea to do so. The deposition requires ceremony – a set of illocutionary practices – to deem it legitimate and authoritative in the eyes of the commons. But there are no settled forms of ceremony for what York calls Richard's "office". Richard is therefore challenged to invent them performatively, and in doing so he occupies a position of immense theatrical strength, even as he resigns his political power.

With the words – "Give me the crown" (190) – Richard accepts the part in which he is cast to do his "service". From this point Richard inhabits the role making apparent the hyperbolic absurdity of the required enactment.

Once an actor is cast in a role there is an element of danger. The theatre is a political space and the power of performance is volatile and uncontrollable. Actors are given their part and their lines but once they are on stage there is very little that can be done to control them. Richard is a recalcitrant player, and he calls into the public spotlight the truth of the situation with a precisely chosen verb. "Here cousin *seize* the crown" (190; emphasis added), he orders: naming the very act that Bolingbroke was endeavouring to disguise. Bolingbroke hesitates. "Here cousin" (190), Richard teases, subjecting Bolingbroke to a demeaning irony. King and usurper stand opposed,

casting each other in roles neither wishes to play.

One source of Richard's power is his capacity to invent the ceremony of resigning the kingship *in his own terms*. Richard insists on his own, central and commanding agency in the undoing of himself.

The chiasmus "Ay, no; no, ay; for I must nothing be" (210) shows Richard struggling with his complicity in resigning the crown; but also with his own identity, for what happens to the actor once the performance is over? Richard commences his journey accepting that he must now be "nothing": "Ay, no; no, ay; for I must nothing be" (210). There is no I. There is no self. Richard will strip himself bare, but the negation of the "I" will lie in the power the "I" has to negate itself: "Therefore no "no," for I resign to thee" (211; emphasis added). Then he adopts a patterned rhetoric, creating a new unprecedented form of ceremony:

> Now, mark me how I will undo myself.
> I give this heavy weight from off my head
> And this unwieldy scepter from my hand,
> The pride of kingly sway from out my heart.
> (4.1.212-15)

Now he employs ringing anaphora:

> 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.
> All pomp and majesty I do forswear.
> My manors, rents, revenues I forgo;
> My acts, decrees, and statutes I deny.
> God pardon all oaths that are broke to me.
> God keep all vows unbroke are made to thee.
> (4.1.216-24)

This is the actor with the power to command attention, and with the newly assumed and invented authority to undo himself – "with mine own hands". His undoing of himself is paradoxically centred on a series of illocutionary acts of supreme confidence: "I give . . . deny . . . release . . . forswear . . . forego . . . deny". Prior illocutionary acts – the sacred prerogatives and duties of kingship, the oaths made to him, and his rights and prior legal performatives – are all dissolved in the fresh authority of his tongue.

He ends this with: "Make me, that nothing have, with nothing grieved, / And thou with all pleased that hast all achieved" (4.1.225-6). He wants this act to melt him away to nothing; to be nothing so he may with nothing be grieved. But although he can melt away his kingship and even his identity, he cannot resign his grief. Nor can the kingdom of grief be usurped.

Against the weight and power of Richard's rhetorical and illocutionary performance, Bolingbroke's single-line responses are entirely reactive, unable to generate the accumulated resonances of Richard's use of anaphora or repeated phrases. Richard gives Bolingbroke his kingship, but paradoxically the usurper begins to be imprisoned. Bolingbroke becomes more and more limited and constrained, reduced to lesser and lesser manoeuvres. He has fewer and fewer lines, which serve merely to feed Richard's word play.

Not only is Bolingbroke denied agency; he is in fact, histrionically, under Richard's control, at his command. The man who, up to this point, has been the rugged champion hero, standing up for the health of the state, the down-trodden and those oppressed by the "caterpillars of the commonwealth" (2.3.170), demanding no more than his fair and rightful claims. The hero becomes the anti-hero and that switch is hinged and perfectly balanced in the exchanging of the crown. As Bolingbroke rises in political power he falls in our esteem and consequently, in his theatrical power.

Richard calls for the mirror, in what Christopher Pye calls "an overt bit of theatrics" (1988: 578). However, this is not merely a theatrical game, but a need to know who he is when he no longer has an assigned role to play. He must see himself reflected to understand, at this moment of utter desolation, when he has no name, no identity, no role, what it is that he must do, say and perform – "I know not now what name to call myself" (4.1.270). The mirror held up to nature is something of which Hamlet reminds us. The mirror was an instrument of education. Early modern instruction manuals bore titles like: *The Mirror of Good Manners*. A compendium of tragic monologues of fallen English political figures, almost constantly in print from 1559-1621, was titled *A Mirror for Magistrates*. He calls for a mirror, "That it may show me what a face I have since it is bankrupt of his majesty" (4.1.277). Richard seeks an instructional manual to know himself, and we are simultaneously looking in this mirror of performance to know ourselves. With the stripping of his identity, our opinions and judgments up to this point are challenged and stripped away. A centrifugal moment that pulls our sympathy to Richard. With him we enter the looking glass, become inverted, and transform our perceptions and emotions.

Shattering the mirror, Richard renders his audience dumb – "Mark silent king the moral of this sport . . .". It is sport – a game – and now the triumphant blow – "How soon my sorrow hath destroyed my face" (4.1.300-1) – *everyone see how you have treated me – how my sorrow has destroyed me, how my face is shattered in a grand theatrical gesture.* Then Bolingbroke rejoins – "The shadow of your sorrow has destroyed the shadow of your face" (302). This is Bolingbroke's moment of triumph. For Richard is halted in his performance – "Say that again. The shadow of my sorrow? Ha, let's see" (303) – he considers. At this critical point of interruption Richard self-re-

flexively plays the critic to Bolingbroke's performance. The chiasmus of the movement of the crown is accompanied by a rhetorical chiasmus. Richard moves beyond overt theatrics to a more subtle reflection on the relation between shadow and substance, interiority and show, into a different kind of theatricality in which what Pye calls the "limitless theatrical illusion" (1988: 578) of the mirror touches the substance of shared humanity. Here character and actor abandon histrionics for a reflection on the reality and also the inscrutability of human emotion. The imagery is immensely complex, resonating with the idea of shadow as mere reflection, as what is unreal, and as the idea of the player or performer as a mere walking shadow.

Actors are shadows that strut and fret; the mirror shows us shadows; the game is but a shadow; but where lies the substance? "Tis very true", Richard declares, "my grief lies all within" (307). He is struck by the realisation that all he has been doing is performing the shadow of his grief – "And these external manners of lament / Are merely shadows to the unseen grief / That swells with silence in the tortured soul" (308-10). Grief cannot be shown or shared; it is silent, hidden and its substance lies in the soul. This prefigures Hamlet's statement to his mother – "I know not 'seems' . . . I have that within which passeth show" (*Hamlet* 1.2.79, 88-9). Richard has that within which passes show. And we as an audience are taken out of the illusion of the performative shadows of actor's body and mirror's image to consider where the substance lies. Alone in our souls. Then Richard asks to leave. He has resigned his crown, and now he resigns his role as actor. He must be alone with his grief. He wishes to go anywhere – as long as he is out of the scrutinizing gaze of his audience.

We ponder for a terrifying moment that everyone is alone with the substance of grief in their souls. But Shakespeare doesn't leave us there. He uses the power of a different kind of theatrical language that allows us to share the substance of Richard's grief, not merely its shadows. With the shattering of the mirror, Richard turns inward, inverting the relation of shadow to substance, and forging a new theatrical power of solitary introspection that is most powerful when it is shared, paradoxically, alone with a silent, enrapt, audience.

The prison scene is the first moment when someone is alone on stage. Shakespeare gives Richard the only soliloquy in the play in sublime verse, untrammelled by rhyming couplets. At his most solitary, isolated moment, Richard connects profoundly with an extended humanity beyond himself. The soliloquy is one of Shakespeare's longest pieces of uninterrupted verse, some 66 lines, exactly double Hamlet's "To be or not to be" speech. Its structure repeats that of the entire play in that it is also hinged at a mid-point, when the interruption of music from outside induces a change in the quality, rhythm and pace of Richard's interior thought. Each half

offers an expression of grief and philosophical wrestling in different modes.

The first line, "I have been studying how I may compare / This prison where I live unto the world . . ." (5.5.1-2), finds Richard in the middle of a solitary mental project. Thinking has preceded his speaking, and the thinking is a complex conundrum. It has many layers. How can his solitary condition reflect a larger experience that reconnects him to the world? How can the truth of existence be understood in a prison? What solace may be found in a pure interiority of thought and feeling? And how may the theatrical stage be a metaphor and not merely a simile for the world: not simply like the world, but the world itself? How may the shadow be the substance?

Stripped of everything except his power to think and speak, Richard thus confronts the problem of solipsism by inverting it. For all his attempts to compare his prison to the world he finds he cannot do it. In contrast to his earlier solipsism, in which he acted as if he alone were the whole world, now, alone, he finds that the world must be peopled by others. In prison he now imagines the world as a place of community and connection, not of solitary existence. I can't compare this prison to the world, for there are no people here, as if the world is only real through our relationship to others: "For because the world is populous / And here is not a creature but myself, / I cannot do it" (5.5.3-5).

But Richard says this to a sea of eyes. This is where Shakespeare takes us from Richard's earlier disquisition on the difference between shadow and substance, inner grief and external performance at the end of the deposition scene. Yes, we are all alone in our grief; here is not a creature but myself. And yet here is a world full of people, with whom I may share a common experience through the connection of empathy: through language. Grief swells with *silence* in the tortured soul – but it is words that express that thought. This monologue with himself is actually a duologue with us – the audience.

He must forge his world like a playwright forges the world we are watching with words, filling the silence and emptiness with sounds and images, giving birth to a whole population of embodied thought. It is difficult work. "Yet I will hammer it out" (5.5.5). In doing so, he builds, word by word, a connection to the audience, isolated and imprisoned in their own bodies yet recognising the self in the other.

Our imaginations engaged, we watch and listen as each thought is born and begets the next in unexpected fecundity.

> 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 humors like the people of this world,
> For no thought is contented.
> (5.5.6-11)

The verse lines here are filled with caesuras. Few sentences in the first half of the soliloquy end on the line, denoting the struggle in this childbirth. Richard engages in a cerebral and spiritual conflict attempting to befriend his thoughts so that they can offer relief, but he is taken and takes us in unexpected directions. The "still-breeding thoughts" people his "little world" (8-9) and the success of this, he realises, lies in the fact that the humours of these thoughts match their analogues in the real world, for none of them is "contented". This introduces a running theme for the rest of his reflection: what is it to be human and contented? As he sets the "word against the word" in the form of two contradictory Biblical notions about the possibility of salvation, he moves through further, conflicted positions that contradict his desire to find solace through solitary thought. He is wracked by ambition and empty consolation alike – vainly imagining the possibility of clawing his way through "the flinty ribs / Of this *hard world*" (20-1; emphasis added) (its hardness conveyed by the spondee – two strong stresses) before he moves to the happier thoughts that find relief in the thought of shared suffering: Richard becomes the "silly beggar sitting in the stocks", sharing his own "misfortunes on the back / Of such as have before endured the like" (25-30). For he draws comfort in the fact that he is not "the first of fortunes slaves, / Nor shall not be the last" (24-5). And the audience is drawn to this moment of vulnerability connecting in recognition that we are not alone.

His critical confession to his audience, "Thus play I in one person many people, / And none contented" (30-1), returns us both to the general notion that no-one in the world is contented, and his playing out, through the conflict between the figures he plays – one urging him to think himself king, another unkinging him again – the absolute elusiveness of contentment. His competing thoughts finally lead Richard to a single, clinching conclusion that includes all human beings in its embrace. "But what'ere I be" – whatever role I play – king or beggar, whatever thoughts I have to define the world or myself – "Nor I, nor any man that but man is / With nothing shall be pleased / Till he be eased with being nothing" (39-41). This is not merely the thought of death offering solace, or a reflection on the emptiness of ambition, but a sense that the loss of ego, the self-acceptance of being a "small model of the barren earth" (3.2.158) – our quintessence of dust – is what we must come to terms with before we can be truly content. We will be pleased with nothing until we are eased with being nothing.

The differences in humour and status, ambition and hope, that have

been entertained in the population of Richard's thoughts and enacted in the play are now negated through a sense of profound identity in the recognition of a shared humanity. The act of stripping us all back to nothing gives us a connection that renders us the least lonely we can possibly be as spectators: finding in our nothingness a real sense of what makes us everything.

A change in rhythm, thought and feeling is introduced with the intrusion of music in the middle of the speech. It comes from outside the world he has created, from beyond the prison cell, evoking the idea of music from the celestial spheres. But the music is out of time. Just as his planetary alignment is harsh and jangled. "How sour sweet music is / When time is broke and no proportion kept. / So is it in the music of men's lives" (5.5.43-5) Now the verse gallops on, the thoughts run uninterrupted, the meter regular like a ticking clock. Having struggled through his thoughts, he now struggles through his feelings, which carry the verse like a breaking wave. His sighs strike like a clamouring bell on his heart, his finger is a dial point to wipe away his tears, he has become a timepiece measuring each minute with his grief, a puppet beating out time dictated by Bolingbroke, who sweeps forward unchecked: "But my time / Runs posting on in Bolingbroke's proud joy, / While I stand fooling here, his jack of the clock" (59-61).

Shakespeare always equates music and time: music out of time signals a greater time out of joint. Instead of soothing the unruly spirit, music out of time provokes madness: "This music mads me" (62). But this madness proves to be a moment of clarity for Richard, as he recognizes his ability to sense "time broke in a disordered string" (47) as his failure to detect his "true time broke" (49). His ear is now true, and we listen to his next lamenting chiasmus with total empathy, sharing the sadness of its music, as the regular pulse of the iambic line heals the broken time of the earlier verse: "I wasted time, and now doth time waste me" (50).

This is another play of mirrors, balanced and hinged, in repeated chiasmus: heroes and anti-heroes, thoughts and feelings, solitariness and community, substance and shadow. And finally love against hate. Richard ends with a blessing that embraces the audience, the musician, and himself in a community of love: "Yet blessing on his heart that gives it me, / For 'tis a sign of love, and love to Richard / Is a strange brooch in this all-hating world" (65-7). We return to the play of substance and shadow: heart against sign, broach against body. This utterly exposed and powerless man has performed to us in solitary intimacy. It is a completely different performance from the formulae of the challenge scenes or the commanding histrionic ironies of the deposition scene. Now the performance of self, the shadows of those performances, is the substance that he thought ineffable, hidden within, in the private consumption of grief. In the final soliloquy Shake-

speare has forged a way for Richard to lament and to share that lament, not in public show but in our willingness and capacity to *follow* Richard, along the lines of a unique theatrical power that, miraculously, makes "that within" something shared.

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