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## **The Eye's Construction of Power in Richard II, Julius Caesar and Macbeth**

John O'Brien

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## Abstract

This study seeks to analyze the optical performance of power in three of Shakespeare's plays: *Richard II*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Macbeth*. Using a political framework via Kantorowicz's *King's Two Bodies* and Maus's *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance*, this paper explores the interior and exterior personas as they pertain and interact with public and private spaces. This paper will track Shakespeare's contribution to this developing "modern" shift in the understanding of appearance and its role in the presentations of power in these three plays. In each of these plays, I argue, Shakespeare provides us with a series of presentational actions or reactions that jeopardize the structure and order of the sovereignty depicted.

*Keywords:* Shakespeare, *Richard II*, *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, *Appearance*, *Performance*, *Power*, *Optics*.

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

The Eye's Construction of Power in *Richard II*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Macbeth*

by

John O'Brien

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Department of English

Thesis Committee:

[REDACTED]

Dr. Naomi Liebler

Thesis Sponsor

[REDACTED]

Dr. Adam Rzepka

Committee Member

[REDACTED]

Dr. Meghan Robison

Committee Member

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## 1. Introduction

In Shakespeare's *Richard II*, sight is key to power. If power is to be respected by the people, the people must see who holds their power. In that play, King Richard disappears to attend to the war in Ireland which is one of the most consequential dilemmas of Richard's rule. His failure to be present in his own country further exacerbates a crisis of his authority. When Lord Salisbury approaches an army of Welsh soldiers who had planned to pledge themselves to Richard, he discovers that they have started packing up their things. When Salisbury inquires the reason, a Welsh Captain provides this response:

'Tis thought the king is dead. We will not stay.

The bay trees in our country are all withered,

And meteors fright the fixèd stars of heaven;

And lean-looked prophets whisper fearful change

...

These signs forerun the death or fall of kings.

Farewell. Our countrymen are gone and fled,

As well assured Richard their king is dead. (*Richard II* II.iv.7-17)<sup>1</sup>

The Welsh captain who delivers this speech has no ocular proof that his king is alive. The Lord Salisbury who hears the news of this has no means to address the captain's claim. The soldiers have seen all that they need to see. They have chosen to abandon their king. While Richard must go to Ireland and lead his military, his inability to be present in his own country leads to the gradual destruction of Richard's own image.

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<sup>1</sup> Quotations of all of Shakespeare's plays throughout this thesis come from *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*. Edited by Stephen Orgel and A.R. Braummuller.



These Welsh soldiers serve only as one example of the people that see Richard's instability as it extends to the nation and the people of that nation. For these Welsh soldiers, Richard's failure to present himself leads them to assume he is dead or about to fall. What is all the more telling is how their eyes look to the nation since they cannot see their king. The landscape, the stars above, and the people who inhabit this country all show signs that these soldiers take seriously. These soldiers will pledge themselves to Richard's enemy because of what they have seen.

Sustaining power depends on controlling appearance. Shakespeare, as dramatist, is aware of how sight and the presentation of sight matter. Deception, illusion, and spectacle all play a decisive role in cultivating the audience's approval. In *Richard II*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Macbeth*, Shakespeare highlights characters in positions of power and how their presentation protects or jeopardizes their rule. For the spectator, these plays offer practice in serving in a monarchy, or rather *seeing* a monarchy.

During the period when Shakespeare was writing (1590-1613), two monarchs ruled: Queen Elizabeth I and King James I. Elizabeth was not a King, and James was not English, which made their respective relationships to the public complicated. Before Elizabeth's reign began, Polydore Vergil completed his *Anglica Historia* (1534), a justification of the so-called "Tudor myth" (Kauffman 515). Simply put, Vergil's history serves as a primary component of the Tudor myth, which justified the Tudor occupation of the throne. Elizabeth's Tudor predecessors were already attempting to preserve the family image. There is an active struggle for Elizabeth's monarchy to prove that she deserves the crown. In order for her to protect her power, she needed not only to consider but also to direct her image. This is already difficult for a monarch who does not have to worry about his gender's validity, but as Philippa Berry notes,

Elizabeth I was constantly being perceived and debated regarding her chastity, and the ability of princes to court her (1-3). She goes on to say that historical representations of Elizabeth's reign were "perceived through the distorting lens of patriarchal attitudes, which characterize history as composed as the actions and experiences of men, and which, when they consider women at all, define them in relationship to men" (61). With this type of attitude dominating the recollection of Elizabeth, in conjunction with her political opponents of that era (62-63), Elizabeth and her supporters were competing for the right to define her identity (61-70). How Elizabeth and James presented themselves had serious consequences for their respective reigns. If either of them failed to validate their authority to the public, they risked losing their power altogether.

A major component to Elizabeth's own political defense of her reign is her expression of the principle of "The King's Two Bodies." The way that Elizabeth embodied the principle is discussed by Katherine Eggert, and the concept itself is well defined and explored by Ernst Kantorowicz. Immediately before Elizabeth's reign, English jurists were attempting to create a legal persona for the king which could be extrapolated from other legal frameworks in place at this time. The conflict that this principle contends with is a justification for the king's actions. The King's Two Bodies principle offers a potential solution by allowing for a second entity to exist within and around the natural or mortal form of the king, protecting his decisions as well as his image. The king "is not only incapable of *doing* wrong, but even of *thinking* wrong: he can never mean to do an improper thing: in him is no folly or weakness" (4). Kantorowicz cites Edmund Plowden and Sir Edward Coke who both comment that the King's body politic cannot be seen or physically handled (4-5), offering an identity that evades representation and mortal flaws. The separations between mortal and immortal bodies are especially tricky, which is why Kantorowicz's research is so invaluable. When a king's natural body dies, another natural body

immediately takes its place, that place being consolidated with the body politic (11). This undying body politic also allows the monarchic apparatus to go on as though there is no interruption in power, that the king truly never dies, and that kingship can signify the never-ending life of the nation.

Elizabeth used the system of the King's Two Bodies to her advantage by expanding the boundaries of her gender to further protect herself from legal criticism. Eggert writes: "The sum effect of this legal fiction is that the monarch's body politic not only subsumes, but also cures, the weaknesses of his or her physical body, including weakness imparted by female sex" (4). The ability of the monarch's body politic to assume this "burden" speaks to the divine entity that has been entrusted to this abstract form. The body politic contains a purity that coincides with its detachment from the physical world. Since this body cannot be seen, it contains intangible and undefined potential. For Elizabeth, she shapes this body politic to emphasize its pure, immortal, and masculine elements. Eggert goes on to say that "both Elizabeth herself and some of the anxious males of her realm made use of this paradigm in order to deflect attention away from her unfortunate femininity and toward the essentially masculine nature of the monarchical persona — serene, wise, and everlasting. The king's two bodies can, in other words, clear at least a temporary space for an untrammelled masculinity" (4). Elizabeth is able to make the case that a male presence exists, separate or intertwined, allowing for her rule to not be wholly and entirely female. The King's Two Bodies principle is made a key element within Elizabeth's highly complex display of power to better secure her sovereignty and stave off any attempts to remove her from the throne.

In tandem with Elizabeth's attempt to control the appearance of her image, this era also encountered an important shift in the understanding of sight, allowing for a science of perception

and a new empirical ground for experimentation. A. Mark Smith explains the theory of “Perspectivism” in his article “Getting the Big Picture in Perspectivist Optics.” The medieval explanation of perception was based on the writings of Aristotle. His notion of sight was object-oriented, as Smith explains: “we proceed inductively, passing from the realm of physical particulars, which is most immediate to us as physical, sentient beings, to the realm of conceptual representations or ideas, which is most immediate to us as percipient reasoning beings” (570). The contributions of the medieval scientists who were repackaging Aristotelian methods, was to organize a system of sight, recognition, and memory. Smith concludes that “what the perspectivists actually offered was less a scientific theory of light or vision than a scientifically justified world view” (569). This sets a tone for the turn of the Seventeenth Century which sees a series of challenges to the dominant theory of vision.

Jennifer Waldron sees the conflict between the new modern and old Aristotelian accounts of vision expressed in the Protestant opposition to stage-plays “proposing that the very act of seeing a play taints any message that it might carry” (50). She highlights Stephen Gosson who actively wrote with the intent to steer audiences from the playhouses so they could indulge a less amoral art form (49). Coincidental with this challenge to aesthetic vision, Galileo invented his first telescope in 1609, enhancing the capability of any eye that looks through it (Machamer and Miller). By the time we reach 1651, Hobbes publishes *Leviathan*, where he makes sweeping critiques of Aristotelian vision, and dismisses some of his optical notions entirely (14).

Waldron’s focus identifies an attempt by Protestant writers to “privilege the linguistic index over the visual icon” (50), but what is seen by this culture is a noticeable shift to interrogate sight and expand its agency. What can be understood by the context given before this paragraph, is a conscientious understanding that what people see matters, and instead of refuting their vision or

redefining what sight means, Elizabeth made her stand by employing the methods of presentation she had at her disposal.

Elizabeth's work to preserve her images is reflected in Shakespeare's plays in the struggle to preserve, prove, or manufacture a stable appearance of power. This paper will track Shakespeare's contribution to this developing "modern" shift in the understanding of appearance and its role in our presentations of power in three plays: *Richard II*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Macbeth*. In each of these plays, I argue, Shakespeare presents us with a series of presentational actions or reactions that jeopardize the structure and order of the sovereignty depicted. Richard II is unable to hold the throne, and when he gives up power, Shakespeare does not spare any details to depict how his people have lost all respect for him<sup>2</sup>. Julius Caesar is threatening the entire power structure of the Roman Republic, but following his death Mark Antony is able to create a new image of Caesar that rallies the people of Rome for his political gain. Macbeth is the only character of the three who has a well-developed interior space that can conceal his actions from his public life. The collision between the interior and exterior of Macbeth's personas breaks down his ability to control his own political appearance.

For each of these plays the sight of the public is a power that is either tamed or lost; to be a monarch of any kind, you must accept the shared relationship that your power contains. Even if you are destined to be crowned, how you present yourself will determine whether or not you deserve it. Control over appearance of power is essential as the subjects view of this appearance — as legitimate or not — is crucial to maintaining that power.

This thesis addresses how the three plays *Richard II*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Macbeth* depict the political presentation of power. The specific focus engages how Shakespeare presents the

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<sup>2</sup> See pp. 17-19 for an analysis of the public's view of Richard.

internal and external dynamic of identity. Katharine Eisaman Maus explains that the concept of inwardness was a large part of Shakespeare's plays and the culture that surrounded them, isolating specifically "the difference between an unexpressed interior and a theatricalized exterior" (2). This convergence of these two roles is what makes optics endlessly complex. Social constructs force us to engage in a kind of role-play that defines how we see one another, and how we ultimately see ourselves. This theory seems to be closely tied to Kantorowicz's analysis of "The King's Two Bodies," and offers a way to see how the two bodies can be reflected or contrasted to the internal and external personalities that are used to describe any individual.

In *Richard II*, this concept of the "unexpressed interior" is completely overwhelmed by a very present and unstable exterior. Richard's constant publicity offers a look at a King who has no private space throughout the play, which is further compromised by the loss of his public identity. By analyzing three specific scenes; the decoronation scene, the last exchange between Richard and the Queen, and the description of Richard's ride through London, this first section seeks to define Richard's lack of privacy as it affects the public's perspective of him. This section sets the precedent for the following two plays that engage with leaders that seek to effectively control and manipulate their image.

In *Julius Caesar*, the "theatricalized exterior" is the primary political weapon wielded by Caesar at the beginning of the play and taken up by Mark Antony at Caesar's death. The use of Plebeians to show the effects of political speech allows Shakespeare to create a plot simultaneously with the conspiracy between Cassius and Brutus. The presence of a populace interjects and interrupts the plans of the Senators who are challenging Caesar, and makes its climax at Caesar's funeral, where Antony stirs the Plebeians into a mob, reversing their opinions

about Caesar and creating a larger-than-life persona that Caesar strived to attain prior to his death.

In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare finally redirects the audience's attention to the interior, cultivating a complex internal and private space where Macbeth can operate, adjacent to the political reality that he shares with the world of the play. This “theatricalized interior” fuses the components of Maus’s discussion, presenting a character who showcases an identity to the audience that he conceals from the world of the play. By analyzing the scenes where the couple can no longer contain their internal personas (Macbeth seeing Banquo’s ghost and Lady Macbeth’s sleepwalking), we can identify how the presentation of power depends on how well they can hide their crimes and contain their identities. This section will analyze the relationship that this highly developed internal space has with the exterior world, and how Macbeth and Lady Macbeth’s attempt to fully separate their personas unravels their world altogether.

## 2. The Failure to Perform in *Richard II*

Katharine Eisaman Maus notes that the English legal system was “imagined to punish socially observed or observable phenomena” (107) and that guilt cannot be assigned until a law is violated or a crime is committed. “Someone who has malicious notions about a neighbor,” she writes, “does not commit slander until she voices them. Someone who contemplates stealing his master’s silverware is not guilty of theft until he actually pockets a spoon or a fork” (107-108). The point is that we can infer, guess, or worry about a person’s internal evil, but this alone does not warrant punishment, nor can we detect motive in the way we can observe wrongdoing. Maus uses this to examine witchcraft trials, and how a system was made to anticipate intangible truths and hidden evils (110-115). These examples provide a public awareness and concern over a hidden identity which suggests malice within itself. She humors one of the legal problems of witchcraft with the question: “For what might witchcraft be, but a particularly virulent intention to do evil, a mind so thoroughly guilty that its inward imaginings spill over into the visible, tangible outer world?” (111). While the law may be concerned with the “spill over” specifically, the general public’s concern with concealed guilt cultivates hysteria around this subject. That public concern matters, as Maus notes, because England’s unique system of justice tasked the public to be “participants in the revelatory process” (107). How the public feel about hidden truth or hidden evil matters, regardless of the legal system’s inner workings.

This is a significant problem for each play discussed in this paper. Whether or not sovereigns can or should hide their personalities from the public is up for debate. Shakespeare takes this up differently in each play, but for *Richard II*, the opposite problem to Maus’s point occurs. Richard is blatantly and publicly damaging England and the throne, and the character displayed has *little awareness* of how public he is, and how much he is responsible for his own



downfall. For Shakespeare, this is an opportunity to complicate the ways that danger or evil present themselves. Maus shows that there is a legitimate fear of the hidden motive because it seems to signal a malevolent intent. While Richard provides sincerity avoiding the problem of hidden evil, he also presents an unstable and multi-faceted identity so public that his destabilization also unbalances the state that he governed. As a binary opposite, Richard hides nothing from the characters in the play that he does not hide from the audience as well<sup>3</sup>.

Shakespeare presents Richard as a figure that is so public, that when he forfeits the public space, he gives up what he understands as his identity.

Shakespeare's King Duncan makes clear the frustration of political forces everywhere: "...There's no art / to find the mind's construction in the face" (*Macb.* I.iv.11-12). This is the line that defines the hidden evil that we are looking for. It matters for Duncan and Macbeth, just as it matters for Brutus and Caesar. It matters for Richard II as well, but in a different way. Christianity provides the human being with a soul that outlasts the physical form which bears an important similarity to the principle of the King's Two Bodies outlined by Kantorowitz. The key difference for *Richard II* is that the King's Two Bodies legally acknowledges and externalizes the divine, making it legal and more tangible than a soul can be. The King's body politic is a necessary fact for the sanctity of the English throne, so much so that this body politic overrides the body natural which complicates the positioning and importance of a king's identity. Caesar and Macbeth are hiding something, and we will delve into those hidden components in the later chapters, but it's important to understand this contrast between the plays as Richard enters the

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<sup>3</sup> See Liebler pp. 60-62 regarding Richard's connection to the murder of Thomas of Woodstock, which initiated the joust that creates the conflict of *Richard II*. Richard's not innocent here, but there is a concern that Mowbray possesses information that could politically destroy Richard.

fray, being the earliest play of these three. As I will demonstrate, the constant publicity of Richard's identity offers a potential failure of a King that is too public and too transparent.

For King Richard, identity is divided but present beyond measure. Kantorowicz himself writes that *Richard II* "is the tragedy of the King's Two Bodies" (26) and argues that there are three specific entities that Richard engages with: The King, the Fool, and the God (26). While Kantorowicz's contributions will be an important guide, it is not the personas themselves that are important to this paper, but Richard's inability to hide any of these personas from the public. Richard is constantly public in his play. He is unable to hide anywhere in contrast to a king such as Macbeth who has both internal and external identities that he oscillates between depending on his company. Richard has no regard for the public that he occupies which is antithetical to the evil discussed by Maus, but all the more damaging to a country that quickly and publicly rejects him.

To understand this lack of private space for Richard II, this chapter will examine three spaces in that play. The first will be his decoronation (IV.i), where Richard must publicly uncrown himself and transfer power to Bolingbroke. In this scene, the personalities of Richard are in conflict in the realization that he must forfeit one of his identities along with his crown. Next, will be an analysis of Richard's relationship with his Queen, specifically focusing on their conversation after Richard has lost the crown (V.i). The marital space, which is a vital private space in both *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth*, is never private in this play, and it further helps provide supplement to a King who has little to no private space throughout the entirety of the play. The final space to be analyzed is the displaced description of Richard's ride through London following the decoronation (V.ii), which is described by the Duke of York and not shown at all. While this sequence serves many functions, it also directly follows the scene

between Richard and his Queen, which is a public and humiliating display that is then juxtaposed by the Duke and Duchess of York who share in confidence the privacy of their home and discuss the public space of Richard's ride. Richard's lack of private space prevents him from being able to direct the perception that the people have on him. When he loses the identity of kingship, he has an identity crisis that is perhaps best resolved by a ride through London where the key descriptor is not on what he is, or what he is doing, but instead the focus directs to what the people of London see in Richard, and how their sight defines him.

### *2.1. Decoronation*

When the decoronation begins, Richard has been through a great deal, having lost the support of most of his nobles, as well as the military. The scene opens without Richard, and Shakespeare gives a great deal of time entertaining the legal question of whether or not the nobles can take Richard's crown, or even if the King can do it himself. It is an important question that also takes the two bodies of the King into account. Even if Richard agrees, the will of the body politic is not clear. The Bishop of Carlisle is adamant that Richard is "the figure of God's majesty" (IV.i.126), warning that if lesser beings of "inferior breath" uncrown him, "the blood of English shall manure the ground" (IV.i.137). Even Richard himself, with respect to God, is technically a lesser being who did not choose to be King. Carlisle's argument is based on the claim that to defy Richard's crown is to defy God. It is an important message that ignores the actions of the character who inhabits that crown but respects the importance of the crown itself. When Richard arrives, he immediately asks:

Alack, why am I sent for to a king  
 Before I have shook off the regal thoughts  
 Wherewith I reigned? I hardly yet have learned

To insinuate, flatter, bow, and bend my knee. (IV.i.162-165)

Not only is this a question to York regarding Richard's own involvement in this ritual, but it also has an internal dialogue within it. Richard speaks about his thoughts as if they are visible to all—which is exactly the problem with his lack of internal privacy. Richard complains here that he does not know what his personality should be, no more than he knows what clothes to wear or what face to make. While he likens himself to Christ in the very same speech – "... but he, in twelve, / Found truth in all but one; I, in twelve thousand none" (IV.i.170-171)—he performs this for the other characters as if he expects them to reassure him of his kingly identity. This mocks the concept of the Divine Right of Kings, and the reverence Carlisle has for that concept in the passages prior to Richard's here. For Richard, it seems that the persona itself is more of a loss than the power or the responsibility of the office of king. And it is in this very public space with escorting officers, the many nobles of the country, and Bolingbroke himself where Richard confesses this. Aside from Carlisle, these men are all enemies of his interests. Yet that does not stop him from being open and forthright in his dialogue.

When Northumberland demands that Richard read over his crimes, Richard becomes deeply introspective, if only to pull out a hollow shell that bears nothing of value to Richard's own sight. He says:

Mine eyes are full of tears; I cannot see.

And yet salt water blinds them not so much

But they can see a sort of traitors here.

Nay, if I turn mine eyes upon myself,

I find myself a traitor with the rest;

For I have given here my soul's consent

T' undeck the pompous body of a king; (IV.i.244-250)

Richard's monologue creates an interesting optical issue, where he is forced to look inward. The inward is invisible for Richard, and he specifically is able to look inward when he cannot see. His inability to cultivate a private space is best displayed here, since he speaks his inwardness to the room. Everything that he is and is not has been displayed for all the nobles to see. He keeps going until Northumberland interrupts him with "My lord —" (IV.i.253) which Richard immediately speaks against:

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. (IV.i.254-257)

For Richard the true failure in this scene is that he has lost his entire identity because it was solely invested in being the King. In the most public way possible, he forfeits that identity, and encounters an empty soul that acts as though it has no notion of a private space, which is then compounded by the performative relationship he has with his wife.

## 2.2. *The Marital Space*

Before Richard and his Queen have their meeting in the end, before the decoronation and the unraveling of Richard's rule, the Queen speaks with Richard's servant Bushy, who sets a tone regarding the relationship of the marriage. Bushy says:

Madam, your majesty is too much sad,  
 You promised, when you parted with the king,  
 To lay aside life-harming heaviness  
 And entertain a cheerful disposition. (II.ii.1-4)

The disruption is clear; the servants of the King are attempting to steer the emotions of Richard and have enlisted the Queen to help them achieve this goal. It may be a poor idea to make the queen a source of entertainment for the King, but more importantly, it damages the trust between them. The Queen is not happy and is unable to confide that in her husband. She replies to Bushy:

methinks

Some unborn sorrow, ripe in fortune's womb,

Is coming towards me, and my inward soul

With nothing trembles. At something it grieves

More than with parting from my lord the king. (II.ii.9-13)

Something is bothering her, she cannot understand what it is, and she is unable to confide in her husband because she has been expected to be happy in service of him.

This intervention within the marriage upends a key private space for Shakespeare. The other two plays under this discussion showcase marriages that cultivate a space where privacy provides an opportunity for couples to prosper, as is the case for Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. More often however, their failure to cultivate that space often ends in tragedy, as it does here, as well for Portia and Brutus, and Calpurnia and Caesar.

When Richard's reign dissolves and the two meet for the last time, it is a bitter conversation where the Queen shows disappointment in Richard's failure and Richard implores her to flee to France and "Think I am dead" (V.i.38). But it is also vital to note that the Queen is with her attendants, and Richard with guards. The space where they have this conversation is a London street on the way to the Tower, and it is not long before Northumberland interrupts the meeting to redirect Richard's course. When this happens, Richard uses it as a means to be

“doubly-divorced” (V.i.71) and gives up on the prospect of being with his wife. When the Queen asks, “must we part?” (V.i.81), it is Richard who answers in the affirmative, not Northumberland. The Queen responds to Northumberland instead of Richard, imploring, “Banish us both, and send the king with me” (V.i.83) to which Northumberland responds, “That were some love, but little policy” (V.i.84). A strange competition then occurs, where the Queen first continues her demand “wither he goes, thither let me go” (V.i.85) and Richard responds “Weep thou for me in France, I for thee here. / Better far off than near, but ne’er the near” (V.i.87-88) which are the words of someone who needs his distance, more than he needs you. Regardless, perhaps they are both devastated by these circumstances. However Northumberland’s line seems to be the determining attribute for all the grief and affection shown here.

Richard’s actions throughout the play are not private, but there is a certain question into how much he is performing them. This scene is the most direct conversation the play has between Richard and the Queen, and it is tragic only by itself if considered independently from the larger narrative. But in the greater scope of the play, their love is not often depicted. Richard rarely seems concerned about anything but himself, and in his competitive affections he closes his great speech of love with the line “Thus give I mine, and thus take I thy heart” (V.i.96). For all the realizations of his vacant, nameless being from one act prior, this is an unfair transaction for the Queen. Richard’s heart is no longer valuable to him. And immediately after his display, the Queen refuses this heart exchange. She is kind and outwardly romantic in her refusal, but it leaves Richard right where he was before, just as alone, with more interest in being sad and alone than being with his wife.

### 2.3. *York's Description of the Public*

Immediately after this scene, Shakespeare brings the audience to the Duke of York's home, where the Duke and Duchess have a discussion. The contrast of these two scenes reiterates the public and private space division that this play interrogates. Where Richard and his Queen have no privacy for the duration of the play, their separation is followed by a domestic scene of York and his wife in their home, while the Duke recounts his observations of Richard and Bolingbroke riding into London. The contrast between the two Kings is stark, signaling a binary opposition between them, potentially nudging towards the King's Two Bodies. But that opposition is best demonstrated by York's description of the public's reaction to seeing both men. When Bolingbroke passed through, York describes it as follows:

... all tongues cried, "God save thee, Bolingbroke!"

You would have thought the very windows spake,

So many greedy looks of young and old

Through casements darted their desiring eyes

Upon his visage; and that all the walls

With painted imagery had said at once,

"Jesu preserve thee! Welcome, Bolingbroke!" (V.ii.11-17)

Bolingbroke's ride is not the focus of York's description. Instead, the focus is directed at the spectators who are looking on and welcoming him. This is difficult for a play to stage, and by using the Duke of York to displace this sequence, Shakespeare directs attention onto the spectators more than the kings. By describing them, the speech moderates the focus, and curates the image that the audience must picture. The spectacle in this case is based on the audience's



reactions, which are even more magnified in the next passage, when the Duchess asks about Richard. Shakespeare leans into the metadrama that he is creating when York states:

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. No man cried, "God save him!"  
 No joyful tongue gave him his welcome home,  
 But dust was thrown upon his sacred head;  
 Which with such gentle sorrow he shook off,  
 His face still combating with tears and smiles,  
 The badges of his grief and patience,  
 That, had not God for some strong purpose steeled  
 The hearts of men, they must perforce have melted  
 And barbarism itself have pitied him. (V.ii.23-36)

Here York indicates two key points. First, it is the eyes that scowl on Richard; their sight performs the action that recognizes and dismisses him with contempt. Second, there is no speech to match their emotion. York does not say if the spectators are quiet, but he repeatedly remarks that they said nothing good. No one welcomed him, nor did they say anything worth repeating. York's lack of clarity offers a reading of silence or a reading of verbal assault, either of which are secondary to the vision of contempt that is compounded by the dust "thrown upon his sacred head" (V.ii.30). Richard and Bolingbroke are not merely at the mercy of God, but very much at

the mercy of the sight of the people of England. The play has developed enough that Richard's punishment feels necessary. He has let his country down, but it also serves as an important reminder for Bolingbroke and all the monarchs that follow. The people may be watching with desire and love, but now that they are watching, Bolingbroke must not disappoint.

For each of the scenes analyzed, Richard's persona has been entirely on display, no matter how internal or personal his thoughts may have been. He is presented in a way that is accessible and open as well as unstable and unfit to rule. *Richard II* is "the tragedy of the King's Two Bodies" as Kantorowicz says (26), but it is a failure on Richard's part, not on the part of the law or the nation. Richard is unable to handle the delicate balance between the life of a king and the life of himself. While there is a convergence between these two entities in every king, when Bolingbroke is crowned, Richard reduces himself to nothing. When he meets his wife for the last time, he does not want her, but her heart, so he might have something from the external world that he can call his own. But York makes it plain that the eyes of London look down upon Richard and reduce him through their gaze to the same level that he has reduced himself. If he had any power in his appearance, it has evaporated and his monarchical power has gone with it.

### 3. The Power of the People in *Julius Caesar*

In *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare experiments much more with political performance, and the ability of a politician to sway the people through deceptive and illusory means. In a discussion about nobility and display in Machiavelli's *The Prince*, he makes a point about the value of good morals as opposed to the value of their appearance:

It is not necessary, then, for a prince to have all of the qualities mentioned above, but it is certainly necessary that he appear to have them. In fact, I would go so far as to say this, that having them and observing them at all times, they are harmful; and appearing to have them, they are useful; for example, appearing to be compassionate, faithful, humane, upright, religious, and being so; but his mind should be disposed in such a way that should it become necessary not to be so, he will be able and know how to change to the contrary. (147)

This discussion practically mirrors the dilemma that is represented in the actions of the well-intentioned Brutus and the well-presented Antony. The intimate nature of this truth speaks to the amorality that comes with politics. It is an idea that hinges on the notion that right and wrong matter less than what people see as right or wrong, or greater than that, what they see at all. This aspect of political performance is perhaps best depicted and contemplated in *Julius Caesar*, which presents a group of senators, led by Brutus, that place belief in ethics and agreement, but fail to account for presentation, and the political advantage the conspirators provide for Antony by killing Caesar. Where Richard II failed to keep himself away from the sight of the English public, Caesar is not only successful, but triumphant in death since he disappears from Rome as a hero. Antony's ability to then embolden Caesar's image beyond his already high reputation is key in validating the Machiavellian idea that to *appear* compassionate and humane is more

politically valuable than being so. Further by practicing that maxim, this play serves as a great example of the manipulation of political optics to destabilize the populace of Rome and by extension, Rome itself.

To best understand how Caesar's presentation of himself succeeds before his death, this chapter will analyze two methods that Shakespeare implements to embolden and complicate Caesar's image. First, the use of Plebeians showcases the reactionary voice of the people, and how Caesar, Brutus, and Antony can affect that voice and the actions of that group. Next, this chapter will focus on the funeral scene as the best example of the "re-presentation" of a character. Caesar's absence allows Antony an opportunity to upend the work of Brutus and Cassius and ultimately empower Caesar's image beyond the scope of Caesar himself.

### *3.1. Plebeians on Display*

It is worth noting that the populace has a role in this play that is more pronounced than it is in *Richard II*. The populace here is represented by laborers in I.i, the throng of citizens in I.ii, and the crowd of Plebeians in III.iii. Each time, there is an interaction between the higher and lower classes which sees Caesar be praised, and opponents of Caesar frustrated by that fact. In the first scene of the play, Shakespeare highlights this frustration with Flavius and Murellus, who inquire from carpenters and cobblers what they are all gathering for. A cobbler explains that "we make holiday to see Caesar, and to rejoice in his triumph" (I.i.30-31). Murellus replies angrily to this news, and demands that the commoners grieve for the loss of Pompey and not celebrate his former enemy Caesar: "You blocks, you stones, you worse than senseless things! / O, you hard hearts, you cruel men of Rome, / Knew you not Pompey?" (I.i.35-37). Naomi Liebler discusses this scene in her book *Shakespeare's Festive Tragedy*, noting the forgotten significance of the Feast of Lupercal whose historical perversion opens the play. Liebler writes: "For the tribunes,

the celebration of Caesar's victory reveals a popular fickleness; Murellus reminds the workers that not long ago they had similarly congratulated Pompey (I.i.32-47). Such flexible loyalty, combined with the conversion of the Lupercal to a secular event whose observation has become ambiguous (I.i.64-69), constitutes a sacrilege" (91). Liebler's elaboration makes it clear that the festival itself is being violated. The violation rests in honoring and venerating a single individual whose "sole corporation" (Kantorowicz 5) has begun to take form by perverting a sacred tradition.

Flavius and Murellus inevitably resolve to undo the most visible element of Caesar's ritual violations: "Let no images / Be hung with Caesar's trophies" (I.i.68-69). To conceal and take down Caesar's image from the streets of Rome threatens Caesar's self-presentation. While they struggle to sway people from celebrating with Caesar, this is an important blow that results in their unclear disappearance: "Murellus and Flavius, for pulling scarves off Caesar's images, are put to silence" (I.ii.285-286).

Shakespeare then introduces a throng of citizens at the start of the next scene who take the place of the commoners of the scene prior. By line 26 the throng exits the stage, but we still hear them at lines 80 and 133 during the dialogue of Brutus and Cassius. The first shout on line 80 prompts Brutus, "What means this shouting? I do fear the people / Choose Caesar for their king" (I.ii.81-82). This fear is the root of Cassius's and Brutus's discussion, but it also is the centerpiece of the conflict that consumes the play. While Cassius and Brutus begin discussing what will later become the plot to kill Caesar, Caesar is improving and enhancing his relationship to the people. The work that Caesar engages in here is not seen, but felt, and Shakespeare reminds us of that work again at the end of Cassius's impassioned speech of Caesar's mortality and feebleness. Brutus responds to the next shout saying, "Another general shout! / I do believe

that these applauses are / For some new honors that are heaped on Caesar” (I.ii.133-135). While Cassius understands Caesar’s mortality, it seems that the play is offering a rebuttal to Caesar’s flaws. It is not that he is greater than man, but that he has generated an adoration around him that has elevated his status beyond mortal men. This counterpoint is not spoken by Caesar but made apparent by the adoring audience that interrupts the scene on stage. What we do not see creates the mystical image of Caesar that he had created in the minds of the Roman public. These moments in the play allow for Caesar’s image to be represented without Caesar having to do any of the work to prove that he is loved to the greater audience of the play.

Shakespeare does not attempt to prove Caesar’s popularity through Caesar’s actions, but instead uses these incidents to demonstrate a strong appreciation that the people have for him. This is one of the great problems that Brutus must face in the play. It is a problem that persists regardless of its cause. Shakespeare uses the brief actions of these commoners to show the audience that Caesar is in control over his public appearance, which makes him very dangerous.

### *3.2. Something Born from the Funeral*

Caesar’s afterimage is brought to life by Antony, but it is kept alive by the people. The work of the previous two sections leave us at a funeral, where a crowd of Plebeians agree with Brutus’s points when he makes them, and Antony’s points when he makes them swaying to the speaker that has their attention. But the Plebeians at this event adored Caesar before its start, and after Antony’s performance, which offers a representation of Caesar that unwrites the representation that Brutus presents, the Plebeians are decidedly persuaded in support of Antony. This scene offers another convergence between classes which sees Brutus and Antony speak to the Plebeians who provide their own commentary in dialogue to their respective speeches. It is important that these scenes present the reactions of the spectators, because the opinion of the

Roman public proves to be the determining factor to the success or failure of either man's speech.

After Brutus presents his case, the consensus of the public is heard between the first plebeian who says, "This Caesar was a tyrant" and the third plebeian's reply "Nay, that's certain. / We are blessed that Rome is rid of him" (III.ii.68-70). A consensus has been made, and the people have taken the stance that Brutus has presented and agreed with it. But Brutus dwelt on the future of Caesar's reign, while Antony refuses to humor it at all. Instead, Antony uses a number of rhetorical strategies that do not acknowledge Brutus's argument. He leads by dismissing the future saying, "The evil that men do lives after them; / The good is oft interrèd with their bones" (III.ii.75-76). This, with many of the statements Antony makes in the beginning, is an inversion of his case. Antony highlights the good of Caesar's career and identifies no evil that would justify Brutus's statements. Antony notes personally, "He was my friend, faithful and just to me" (III.ii.85) and goes on regarding Rome's greater benefit:

He hath brought many captives home to Rome,

Whose ransoms did the general coffers fill.

Did this in Caesar seem ambitious?

When that the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept.

Ambition should be made of sterner stuff. (III.ii.88-92)

Antony's ability to generate sympathy is pivotal because it not only preserves Caesar's image for the public, but it preserves Antony's as well. This speech is one that conveys sadness and anger in tandem, without getting in the way of the message of Caesar's greatness. Antony may be mourning, but those emotions act as a resource to authenticate this speech, giving it a power beyond truth which Brutus cannot compete with. While this is convincing enough, Antony

pushes further, using the work Caesar has done up to this point as proof of his goodness. He implicates the people and their sight:

You all did see that on the Lupercal  
 I thrice presented him a kingly crown,  
 Which he did thrice refuse. Was this ambition?  
 Yet Brutus says he was ambitious,  
 And sure he is an honorable man.  
 I speak not to disprove what Brutus spoke,  
 But here I am to speak what I do know.  
 You all did love him once, not without cause.  
 What cause withholds you then to mourn for him?  
 O judgment, thou art fled to brutish beasts,  
 And men have lost their reason! (III.ii.95-105)

What further strengthens Antony's argument is the work that Caesar did to create the beginnings of this identity. The persona that Antony is presenting is the divine being that Caesar worked so hard to create. It is a being that Cassius has disproven, but a being that no longer can be subject to mortal limitations. Caesar is dead, which limits the autonomy of the being, but it unleashes the autonomy of his image, which Antony fully exploits. This is Machiavelli's lesson at work.

Looking back at that quote from the beginning of the chapter, Machiavelli writes:

appearing to be compassionate, faithful, humane, upright, religious, and being so; but his mind should be disposed in such a way that should it become necessary not to be so, he will be able and know how to change to the contrary. (147)



Antony's work with appearance not only deflects the spotlight off of his own character but directs it at a character that is now completely void of any secrets, intentions, or flaws. All Antony needs to do is identify the ways that Caesar appeared good, to prove to those who had already witnessed those events to believe it. Further Antony's ability to do this reveals his own political capability through performance. By the time Antony holds for tears, he has undone the agreement between Brutus and the Plebeians that Caesar was wrong, and has complicated that truth, so that he might completely destroy it by the end of the funeral. Moreover, he has invented a caricature of Caesar, one which ignores any possibility of flaw or weakness, and only preserves that which Caesar wished to cultivate in this divine persona.

The same event in which Casca describes Caesar as "loathe to lay his fingers off" the crown (I.ii.236) is now used by Antony to demonstrate Caesar's humility. When Antony goes further and accuses that "men have lost their reason" (III.ii.105), he challenges the Plebeians to disagree with a series of statements that are true for their perceptions. Further by targeting their sense of reason, he makes them believe that they have the autonomy to see the situation clearly. When the First Plebeian says during Antony's first break, "Methinks there is much reason in his sayings," (III.ii.108) he succeeds in swindling the Plebeians' agreement away from Brutus.

The rest of the speech is a more conversational and methodical approach where Antony baits the Plebeians into complete dedication to his argument. This is marked by two spectacles, which are the presentation of Caesar's body, and the presentation of Caesar's will. Antony makes such a tremendous show of both but is able to play off of a number of Plebeians who have already turned against Brutus, now turning into something much worse. Phrases such as "He would not take the crown, / Therefore 'tis certain he was not ambitious" (III.ii.112-113) and "There's not a nobler man in Rome than Antony" (III.ii.116) signal a complete reverse of the

state the crowd was in by the end of Brutus's speech. That line also speaks to the Machiavellian point again. Antony's speech here has now gone so far to empower him and his image that is solidified by the Plebeians. Further, Antony's show after his original speech pushes the Plebeians away from Brutus until they begin echoing the following lines at one another "O piteous spectacle!" (III.ii.195), "O noble Caesar!" (III.ii.195), "O traitors, villains!" (III.ii.197), "We will be revenged" (III.ii.198). The next line is the climax for this crowd turned mob which chants in unison: "Revenge! About! Seek! Burn! Fire! Kill! Slay! Let not a traitor live!" (III.ii.199-200). And of all the manipulation that Antony provides may be best described in the lines that follows this declaration from the mob:

For I have neither wit, nor words, nor worth,  
 Action, nor utterance, nor the power of speech,  
 To stir men's blood. I only speak right on.  
 I tell you that which you yourselves do know,  
 Show you sweet Caesar's wounds, poor poor dumb mouths,  
 And bid them speak for me. (III.ii.215-220)

Antony's ability to completely rile a mob and then put the blame for that act on everything but him is extraordinary. But it is Caesar's corpse and the optical spectacle of it that provides Antony with such a tremendous advantage. In the optical battle for the people's attention, Caesar has constantly been outmaneuvering his political opponents. In this instance, his dead body has even more agency, with help from the dangerously talented Mark Antony who remembers the flaw of Cassius outlined by Caesar: "He loves no plays, / As thou dost, Antony" (I.ii.204-205). Antony uses the spectacle of Caesar's body to continually keep Caesar's image alive so it might transcend the mortality that he was trapped to during his life. It is a tremendous achievement that

Antony can only accomplish by carrying out the mission of dedicated optical manipulation and reason-defying presentation, which has dominated Caesar's role in this play throughout.

The work of Caesar and Antony in this play to present a reality to the people of Rome succeeds in overriding the intention, belief, and concern of Cassius and Brutus. The destabilization of the Roman Republic is a result of the actions of the Plebeians who were driven to conclusions by the optics presented and performed for them. It is a style of Machiavellian politics that thrives on illusions, and the ability of Antony to provide the appearance of noble qualities to dismantle Brutus's own noble actions. This mastery of appearance also identifies the power of the populace who can make tremendous change when motivated to do so. The re-presentation of Caesar's image inspires that populace to punish the conspirators and dismantle the Republic.

#### 4. The Performance of the Hidden Personas in *Macbeth*

Maus presents a key feature of private space that sets the tone for how the internal persona is presented in this play. She asks, "For what might witchcraft be, but a particularly virulent intention to do evil, a mind so thoroughly guilty that its inward imaginings spill over into the visible, tangible outer world?" (111). The guilt that spills over into the outer world is precisely what ails Macbeth and Lady Macbeth after their success in murdering King Duncan and seizing the throne. In contrast to the other two plays, and perhaps because it is the latest of the three, this play delays the cost of the actions of the tragic hero. Richard is in a downward spiral from the moment his play begins, and Julius Caesar is killed before he can reach the place of power he sought out, regardless of the people's opinion of him. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth taste success in their enterprise and find themselves in the seat of power early on in the play. What got them there and what kept them there was their ability to hide the truth by presenting an artificial and external persona.

One of Shakespeare's great achievements in this play is the display of interior and personal spaces within the exterior and public scenes of the drama. Specifically, the "banquet scene" involving Banquo's ghost (III.iv) and the scene of Lady Macbeth sleepwalking (V.i) perform collisions between these kinds of spaces. Both characters, who are adept at concealing their internal personas<sup>4</sup>, are confronted with their own hidden identities in public arenas that damage their ability to control their appearances. Over the course of these two scenes, Shakespeare displays the private space in conflict with their public space while they hold their positions as monarchs. Whereas Richard II fails to control his appearance at all, and Julius Caesar's appearance is manipulated beyond the scope of his life, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's

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<sup>4</sup> See I.v (1-29, 37-57), I.vii (1-81) for the display of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's internal personas.

appearances are manipulated with precision in the first act of this play, only to unravel as they become more public. And their fear of revealing their hidden persona leads to a failure to perform, similar to the difficulties encountered by Richard II.

#### *4.1. Banquo's Ghost*

When the play reaches its center in III.iv, King Macbeth is confronted with the ghost of the recently murdered Banquo during a feast in the castle. The dialogue that occurs between Macbeth and his nobles transmits a visual marvel that breaks down the boundaries of Macbeth's internal and external worlds while presenting them in a means that the audience can clearly discern. Macbeth's claim that "The table's full" (III.iv.45) and Lennox's response "Here is a place reserved, sir" (III.iv.45) directs the audience's attention to the glaring problem that haunts our leading character. Macbeth's singular and individual perception is transmitted on the stage in such a way that allows the spectator to see just how developed Macbeth's internal persona is, and how his performance in this scene pulls that persona into the outside world.

As Macbeth spirals into a feverish state that the thanes begin to acknowledge, Lady Macbeth tries to ease the tension in the dining hall. In her attempt to mediate the situation, she speaks first to the guests:

My lord is often thus,

And hath been from his youth. Pray you keep your seat.

The fit is momentary; upon a thought

he will again be well. If much you note him,

You shall offend him and extend his passion. (III.iv.54-58)

Lady Macbeth's attempt to conceal Macbeth's rapidly unraveling state is entirely about how to control Macbeth's performance. She attends first to the public arena to redirect their eyes. By

asking them to look away and citing their observation as a cause of his "fit," Lady Macbeth sets an interesting precedent about the risks of being seen. This line offers a considerable problem for Macbeth's entire rule. Taking note of his kingship at all risks offense. The attention that the crown provides does not allow Macbeth and Lady Macbeth to hide their internal personas any longer. In fact, it has directed more attention on them now that they have elected to wield this power.

When she changes focus to chastise Macbeth, her declaration collapses the private space that they had shared up to this point and separates Macbeth's perceptions from hers. She says, "Why do you make such faces? When all's done, / You look but on a stool" (III.iv.68-69). Here, her intimacy with her husband has been lost. She does not see what he sees, nor can she afford to try and understand. Macbeth's hallucination is tremendous for its length in the play. Macbeth does not realize the ghost is unreal for about 60 lines. Nor does he stop to recognize the way his actions appear. He is so horrified that he can no longer pretend. The sight of this spectacle shakes him from the performance he has inhabited since being approached by the weird sisters in Act I. He is so ensnared in his belief that he says, "If I stand here, I saw him" (III.iv.75). The ramifications are clear. Macbeth has staked his existence on the reality of this illusion. And while he is not alone in seeing Banquo (aided by the audience members surrounding the stage), the world Macbeth exists in does not recognize his own perception. And his belief in this illusion has left him untethered to the world he is a part of. Macbeth experiences this illusion so deeply that he has become unable to separate the interior and exterior personas that are the fabric of his success. He could have hidden the crime of Banquo's murder, but that crime has forced itself into his public and present reality through Macbeth's hallucination in this public space. To hide it

is to refuse to believe his own eyes and his own sensations. To hide this crime is to hide from reality itself.

#### 4.2. *Lady Macbeth's Sickness*

For Lady Macbeth, hiding from reality becomes her state of being. By V.i she sleepwalks before the Doctor and reveals her deep unease. When she enters the scene the Doctor notes that her eyes are open, but the gentlewoman replies, "Ay, but their sense are shut" (V.i.26). The gentlewoman is keen to note that the sleepwalking started "since his majesty went into the field" (V.i.4) which creates a lack of private space that Lady Macbeth requires to best cultivate her inward persona. With the loss of their shared private space of I.v, she endures the same terror that Macbeth does in III.iv. While her waking state may not be directly confronting this problem yet (as it will soon be discussed in V.iii), her unconscious mind has forced her to confront her guilt in this performance. When she simulates the washing of her hands, the past reality presents itself and persists. The metaphor serves well to show that the stain is an internal one. She can keep her exterior body clean and well presented, but the stains on her interior self are presenting themselves to the outer world. This unconscious act is symmetrical to Macbeth's in a complete loss of awareness coupled by the person's need to publicly confront their evil.

What Shakespeare notes through the voice of the gentlewoman during these bits of speech acts as a very poignant reaction to the hidden truths that Lady Macbeth is revealing. The Doctor states the obvious, "You have known what you should not," (V.i.46-47) to which the gentlewoman replies, "She has spoke what she should not, I am sure of that. Heaven knows what she has known" (V.i.48-49). The audience's involvement is then vital to this fusion of public and private states. When the private spaces were more clearly defined by Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's monologues, those spaces included the audience. The most public arena of the stage

serves as the most private for these characters. For the Doctor and the Gentlewoman who are learning of Lady Macbeth's secrets, this revelation about her character is shocking. The audience, however, is witnessing a different phenomenon of the disruption between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's interior and exterior lives. It does not necessarily present itself as the evil that must spill out, but instead a total unraveling and loss of control of their public and private separations. The self is in a state of peril where the stark separation between interior and exterior states has led to their collision and a slow and public destruction.



## 5. Conclusion

The publicity that each play shares demonstrates how deeply fragile appearances become when they must be preserved, manufactured, or proven. Frameworks of politics create boundaries that may protect the power of a monarch, but they do not ensure that such power will be respected and honored. In the *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes makes an important point on power that is reflective of the ethics Shakespeare had been discussing half a century prior: “The manifestation of the Value we set on one another, is that which is commonly called Honouring and Dishonouring. To Value a man at a high rate, is to Honour him; at a low rate, is to Dishonour him. But high, and low, in this case, is to be understood by comparison to the rate that each man setteth on himselfe” (63). The honor that Hobbes speaks of is dictated by sight. How people perceive one another, and how people present themselves define our interpersonal value system. For a king who inherits this power, he may expect the honor to be inherited as well, but it is not. When York describes Richard II following Bolingbroke, he describes it as an actor who must follow a great actor, incapable of being able to meet such high expectations (V.ii.23-26), but Richard failed to seize his opportunities. The work of any monarch to preserve their power is based in how they preserve their image and their representation. Antony understood this, doing so much to empower Caesar’s public image which tore Rome apart. But for Macbeth, who compromises his own internal self, and his own internal value so that he can manufacture a higher external value, he has deceived his way to a false type of honor which he is never able to secure. These lessons are incredibly painful. In each failure there is tremendous and overwhelming change. That results in significant loss to the nation.

Elizabeth I has shown that performance is important and necessary for the protection of her image and her throne. However, Shakespeare’s point seems to be that good performances are

not the marker of a good or bad sovereign, but a tool that can empower or devastate any political system. King Duncan's statement, "...There's no art / to find the mind's construction in the face" (*Macb.* I.iv.11-12) puts in focus the optical challenge that falls on those who wish to protect systems of power. We do not have access to any means to prevent this tool from being used. However, seeing the ways that the tool has been exploited is our best defense.

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