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"There Lies the Substance"– Aspects of Non-Tragic Self-Reference in Shakespeare's *Richard II*

Richard II is a play of inadequacy. The woeful privatehistory-taleofthe fall of an inadequate ruler, due to its keen focus on personal character and private psychological concerns, demands a unique, lyrical tone and modality, which, as opposed to the dynamic dramaturgical constructions of the majority of thetraditionally collective and objectively presentedhistory plays, seems strangely unorthodox. It presents a multitude of character traits, stylistic devices and dramaturgical elements that bring the story of the downfall of Richard closer to tragedy; the structure and direction of the dramatic action, the rendering of the plot, the nature and relations of the characters and the language use of the play all function as indicators of a tragic perspective.[1]

Although these potentially tragic characteristics show obvious analogies with Shakespeare's great tragedies and possibly give clues to interpret and have a deeper understanding of them, *Richard II* should not be read asa tragedy in thetraditional sense. Its personalised focus is rather a key to enter the pluralised world of history[2], making the play function as a unique constituentwithinthe organic framework of Shakespearean history plays, in which, opposing and at the same time complementing its contrasting elements it can give the whole its full, heterogeneous complexity.[3] The ultimate uniqueness of *Richard II* lies in its self-referential registers that are conveyed by the intimate modality of poetry.

However, the key that opens the door to extra- and intertextual interpretations temporarily locks the one that looks inside and would be able to bring us closer to the central figureand the private domains of the play. Thus, we might feel that*Richard II*is not more than a nicely embroidered word-woven tapestry with monologues of gilded threads laced with the self-reflecting darkness of humiliation and loss; a pseudo-tragic poetic confession, which, despite its lyrical intimacy, eliminates its own possibilities for a tragic outcome. On the one hand, this deliberate misuse of tragic traitscarries many risks on multiple levels and can easily prevent the reader or the audience from understanding and feeling the hidden implications of the higher-ranking meta-world of theatre that bears primary importance in Shakespearean drama. On the other hand, in a good production the mock-tragic quasi inadequacies of *Richard II* can be turned to an advantage, andthrough its (self-) contradictorydevices of personalisation and alienation make us able to gain insight into the most beautiful realms of artistic self-reflection.

Hence, it is important to map the anatomy of Shakespeare's non-tragic devicesas functional elementswithin the dramatic structure relating to theiranalogies with the tragic, and find the possible intentions of their application as mediators between the textual and extra-textual layers.

[1] The fact that from Richard's twenty-two-year reign Shakespeare's play only covers his last is in itself very telling; the action thus cannot possibly represent the actual deeds of the ruling king in their present tense continuity, it can only reflect and comment on them in retrospect, placing Richard's tale into the realms of the slowly unfolding dramatic tense of present perfect – with an adequately prepared and pointedly marked end. A narrative that focuses on the inevitable fall of its protagonist cannot but suggest a tragic modality.

[2] Plural primarily in the Kottian sense – within the "impersonal" realms of the "Grand Mechanism" of history– but accessed and interpreted through the inner domains of the individual. Kott 1967, 54.

[3] Tillyard claims "we shall admit that Shakespeare knew what he was doing from the start and deliberately planned this stylistic contrast" between his works within the "great symphonic scheme" of history playsand that "*Richard II*is imperfectly executed, and yet, that imperfection granted, perfectly planned as part of a great structure". Tillyard 1944, 234., 244.

There are four most important aspects through which the overall meaning of meta-textuality and self-reference can be most successfully unfolded. As it is usually easiest to start with drawing the lines of a text's generic characteristics, and in *Richard II*'s case it is unavoidable to draw extra attention to its ritualistic qualities, firstly we should regard theform and stylistic functions of ritual drama, embedded in the narrative framework of passion plays, a possible point of reference, with special regard to the character and the (in) capabilityof its tragic hero. Turning from the contextual to the textual, from the stylistic to the linguistic levels of the play, we should focus on the dominance of words over actions thatsignifytheir alienating yet referential qualities, which take away from the play's dynamism and the dramatic weight of the protagonist but at the same timegive way formanifold meta-textual interp-retations. As another, semantically more complexaspect to justify the importance of words, we should discuss the play's textually induced space-relations, that is the inter-relatedness of names and their locational identifiersconcerning (thedispersal or loss of) characters' identities. Finally, moving away from the indirect extra-textual references carried by words, the explicit meta-theatrical registers of acting within and outside the play should be regarded as an overall, more general perspective,highlightingthe most external layer of (non-) tragic self-reference: the poet-king's responsibilities to serve his audience as a commentator on the world of role-playing and pretence.

The Passion of "Unking'd" Richard – a Plural Rite

The reversed dramaturgy of *Richard II* is most obviously manifested in the nature of the dramatic sub-genre itself: because of its subject matterand structural organisation it can beeasily classified as a passion play[4] in its most traditional and also metaphorical sense with all its necessary trademarksand signifiers that builds upon the passivity, the spiritual and physical diminution of the central character andfinally leads the play tothe tragic hero's self-humiliation and sacrifice by "taking off all the lendings" in a proto-Christian, Learian manner. The framework of the passion play is inherently ritualistic, employing a divine, God (-like) entity as a protagonist, setwithin the symbolic, reiterative ceremonial practice of religious activities.

The ritualistic qualities of *Richard II* have frequently been emphasized by literary critics throughout the centuries, often enlisting its Biblical references, religious vocabulary or highlighting its structural similarities with the Catholic liturgy.[5] These parallels of structure and style are obvious textual

[4] I use the term "passion play" both in its historical sense, referring to the religious performances in Europe from the 13th century onwards, "representing the trials, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth" and in its symbolic, nominal connotations relating to the passivity of the main character that might also coexist with textual, linguistic constructions of passive modality (non-agentive and narrated instead of active and dramatic, non-personal and universal as opposed to the individual and particular). Baldick 2008, 249.
Following the lines of Northrop Frye's division of Shakespearean tragedy, *Richard II* might be closer to "the tragedy of isolation" than to "the tragedy of passion", even though the collision of social and personal layers, which is a characteristic feature of the latter, is necessarily present in every history play. On Frye's division of tragedies see Frye, Northrop. Fools of Time. 1967. University of Toronto Press. Toronto.
However, in his later essay on *Richard II* Frye highlights the play's analogies with the passion narrative by commenting on Richard's attitude towards his own downfall: "when disaster becomes objective he instantly begins to see himself as the central figure of a secular Passion." Frye 1986, 65.
On the historical background, different interpretations and the socio-cultural and literary aftermath of passion plays see Fischer-Lichte, Erika. History of European Drama and Theatre. 2002. Routledge. London. 33–49.

[5] As Walter Pater puts it: "*Richard II* stands so remarkably close to the Catholic service of the Mass that it ought to be played throughout as ritual" qtd. inBryant Jr. 1973, 188.

manifestations of the idea of medieval patriarchal kingship which builds upon the image of the English sovereign as God's earthly substitute, as "the deputy elected by the Lord" whom "heavens guard"(III. 2. 57)[6] and whose words and deeds are thus protected by heavenly authorities.[7] The king stands for the divine protagonist of passion plays, a Christ-like figure whose sacred will is absolute and indisputable, as it is confirmed by Gaunt:

> GAUNT: God's is the quarrel – for God's substitute
> His deputy anointed in His sight,
> Hath caus'd his death; the which if wrongfully
> Let heaven revenge, for I may never lift
> An angry arm against His minister (I. 2. 37)

To strengthen the idea of Richard's alleged Christ-like attributes, Shakespeare provides us with a boundless storehouse of religious vocabulary and direct Biblical references,[8] especially in Act I, where the endless exuberance of linguistic mannerisms are most probably meant to express something of the hollowness of Richard's public figure and of the institution of the royal court itself. Hence, even the manner ofdrawing the basic parallel between Christ and the English king is a good means of expressionfor the incapability of the latter fulfilling his assigned duties and a signifier of the fall of an idealised notion that has slowly started to fade.

In its traditional, Christian interpretation a passion play – and every tragic narrative of the dramatic ritual – first and foremost is in need of a tragic hero, an individual of free will,[9] whose humiliation andself-sacrifice might be followed by rebirth and can bring about something completely new. The rite of tragedy always ends in private and shared "transubstantiation",[10] which marks the changing of the status quo within the given community, triggered by the death of the hero. Although the fall of Richard contains elements that are analogous with the traditional narrative sequence of tragedies, the characteristics of the history play simply undermine the concluding tragic effect in two most obvious ways.

[6] All quotations are from the Arden Edition of Shakespeare's *Richard II.* Shakespeare 1956, 3–180.

[7] Tillyard claims that "history in fact grows quite naturally out of theology and is never separated from it." Tillyard 1944, 9.
This means, as Frye argues, that since "Jesus Christ was regarded as the king of the spiritual world, lawful kings in the physical world [were] his regents." Frye 1986, 55.

[8] See I. 1. 104–140: "sacrificing Abel"; "our sacred blood"; "I last received the sacrament"; "I did confess it"; I. 3. 34–85: "to God of heaven, King Richard and to me: And as I truly fight, defend me heaven! "; "bow my knee"; "let us take a ceremonious leave"; "However God or fortune cast my lot"; I. 3. 102–120: "I cry amen"; "*spectators murmur in astonishment*" etc.

[9] H. B. Charlton, interestingly, emphasises the inherent tragic aspects of *Richard II* in relation to the character of its protagonist. Ha claims that as opposed to the "superman heroes" of Shakespeare like Richard III, who were more difficult "to bring to a tragic end", it was much more comfortable to arrange tragedy around an ordinary human being like Richard II, as he was weak, and his weakness enabled him to break more easily. "To be tragic, Richard must be broken; as a man, whose prevailing characteristic is fragility, he has within himself the instrument of his own destruction. Ultimately his tragic collapse is inevitable. As his end is thus inevitable, he provides that sense of inevitability which is the main source of tragic conviction. "Charlton 1948, 44.

[10] The transubstantiation of the sacrificial body (from the signifier to the signified through the symbolic process of the dramatic ritual) relates first and foremost to the primary (singular) subject – whose body has been humiliated and sacrificed –, but also to the secondary (plural) subjects – the community –, whose change the former motivated.

The first is derived from the problem of quantity: in a historical context the fallen hero, the king can never be fully himself and thus can never reach the required level of "tragic singularity", as he is determined to exist in plurality by law. The essentially dual identity of public figures was a common notion in Elizabethan England,[11] with special regard to the king, who was considered "*Twin-born with greatness, subject to the breath / Of every fool*".[12] Hence, in spite of (or rather because of) his divine status his identity (and his body) is inherently dividedand shared. He is a public property of the nation, who is unfitted and totally incapable of willing or forced individual sacrifice. The second problem is related to the direction of changes after the fall: Richard's destruction does not change the conditions of the society for the betterby any means, but on the contrary, the unlawful deposition of the anointed sovereign and the crowning of Bolingbroke foreshadow wars and continuous turmoil.[13]

CARLISLE: […]if you crown him, let me prophesy –
The blood of English shall manure the ground,
And future ages groan for this foul act,
[…]And, in this seat of peace, tumultuous wars
Shall kin with kin, and kind with kind, confound.
Disorder, horror, fear, and mutiny
Shall here inhabit, and this land be call'd
The field of Golgotha. (IV. 1. 135–144)

The play is taken further away from the "true sense" of the passion narratives by Richard's confusion and unwillingness to accept his part in the preordained sequence of the death-game. Although it is emphasised many times that "with his own hands", "with his willing soul" he gives away his crown, it is obvious thathis deposition is only seemingly willing, his pseudo-sacrifice was forced upon him, and left him no opportunity to retain even the fading shadow of his dignity.[14]

What you willhave, I'll give, and willing too,
For do we must what force will have us do.
[…] Then I must not say no. (III. 3. 206–300, emphasis mine)

[11] According to Kantorowicz, the concept of "the king's two bodies" was commonly used in legal jargon, but related notions were later "carried into public when, in 1603, Francis Bacon suggested for the crowns of England and Scotland, united in James I, the name of "Great Britain" as an expression of the 'perfect union of bodies, politic as well as natural' (169)" Although the image has completely vanished from modern constitutional thought, it still has a "very real and human meaning", due to Shakespeare, who eternalised the metaphor and made it the "substance and essence of his greatest plays"(171). Kantorowicz 1973, 169–185.

[12] See *Henry V* 4. I. 215.

[13] We might even argue that it does not change anything at all. If we consider the play as a complete whole and disregard the obvious references to the historical context following the death of Richard II and to the Tudor mythin particular, we can say that in the play no one is *truly* affected; society and its individuals remain mostly indifferent to the changes in the line of succession.

[14] Walter Pater calls Richard's de-crowning ceremony an "inverted rite", which, although it has ritual qualities, serves the mere purpose of degradation without final magnification. Pater 1973, 53.

With the final act of the "unkinging" process Richard is obliged to give away his plural body, the crown, and thus, as a crucial element of the passion rite, expose himself[15] – that is the private, singular body of the "bare, forked animal"[16]–to his audience,[17] which, however, seems to be disrupted and gains true substance only in the very last scenes of Richard's self-reflection.

I have given here my soul's consent
T'undeckthe pompous body of a king;
Made glory base, and sovereignty a slave;
Proud majesty a subject, state a peasant.
(IV. 1. 249–252, emphasis mine)

King Richard's tale corresponds to the textual structure,linguistic modality and pace of the passion narrative as well. The cyclical mutability of history, the succession of kings and the trivially insignificant changes in the individual bodies of public servants are all analogous with the repetitive pattern of rituals, in which the symbolic acts of rite are repeatedly acted out as reduced, "humanised" models ofgreat archetypesof divine nature.[18] Shakespeare's histories are also models; miniature word-worlds symbolically representing the whole of history's humankind with recurring patterns and names. The major difference lies in the nature of the tragic individual; while rituals require heroes of innate grandeur and magnitude[19] whose great deeds and final sacrifice could be repeated as examples for the community, history plays – even though originally they were regarded as one of the most important tools to foresee the future and gain practical knowledge of life[20] – can hardly show up individuals of great "authority" in a Learean sense to count as real models; in fact they aremost possibly deliberately devoid of them to strengthen the concept of de-sacralisation of the divine authority of the English royal court.

[15] For a more thorough elaboration on the exposure of the body in passion narratives see Alexandra Poulain's articles on the topic in The Yeats Annual No. 19: Yeats's Mask. 2013. 49–63. andin The Journal of Irish Studies. 2013. 3, 181–190.

[16] See *King Lear* III. 4. 60.

[17] Richard's audience, just as himself, is pluralised: he is constantly playing for an audience within, and for another audience outside the play. On the inherent meta-theatricality of *Richard II* see the last chapter.

[18] Grotowski 2009, 67. For a more detailed analysis on the relationship of theatre and rituals see Grotowski, Jerzy. Színházésrituálé. 2009. Kalligram. Pozsony. 60–83. About the cyclical mutability of history, seeKott 1967, 3–57.

[19] Compare Richard's downfall to King Lear's: in the passion narrative of Lear, where – dramaturgically speaking – the painful process of tragic humiliation starts very early, the already "unkinged" Lear is still said to have something in him that convinces Kent to follow him on his way of degradation:
KENT. "You have that in your countenance which I would fain call master.
LEAR. What's that?
KENT. Authority. ' (*King Lear* I. 4. 20–22)

[20] Tillyard comments on the uses of history referring to Raleigh's preface to his *History of the World*:"the ruling idea is that history repeats itself", so "we have a power to foresee the future and therefore in some way to provide for it" and that "history is of great practical uses". In Berners's preface to his translation of Froissart he says "that by reading history young men acquire the wisdom of age", thus"history knits together people separated by time and space". qtd. inTillyard 1944, 55–56. Tillyard also mentions that the English chronicle play continues the practice of medieval chronicles, that is "to provide a repertory of recreational anecdote, to serve as memorial of great men, and to convey separate moral lessons". Tillyard 1944, 100.

The Anti-Tragic Word-World of Kingship

The passivity and the weakened dramatic body of the main character shifts the play's focus from action to passion, from deeds too words, from dynamic dialogues to moderate monologues. Until thefinal moment of identity creation, the king's dramaturgical presence is painfully missing, and it has inevitable consequences concerning the play's pace, the ways of its theatrical presentation and reception. The absence of the core not only strips the would-be tragedy to the bones of mechanic automatism, but also degrades the ritual to the mere superficiality of ceremonial practice, where form, language and pompous artificiality overrule meaning and substance.

A good example for the seeming worldcovering the essence of things is the preparation for the mock-duel of Bolingbroke and Mowbray in Act Iscene 1 and 3, in which "all the rites of knighthood" serve to stage this conflict of semblance, whose physical actiondoes not even take place.[21] Instead, ritualistically they call "heaven be the record to their speech"(I. 1. 30) which they present to God's anointed, to their "dear dear lord, the purest treasure mortal times afford"(I. 1. 177), and "speaking truly to their knighthood and their oath"(I. 3. 14) they "kiss their sovereign's hand and bow their knees" to finally accept their sentences to take a "weary pilgrimage" – "a ceremonious leave". The problem is solved by words, accompanied by trumpets and drums without even one drop of blood, letting the two accused dukes usearms merely as objects of ritual: "Return again, and take an oath with thee. / Lay on our royal sword your banish'd hands"(I. 3. 178).

To strengthen the image of the king's word-ridden environment, the sentence itself,[22] its length and individual consequencesfocus on linguistic expression and are communicatedby lexical terms; words become containers of time and space, they are the agents and the objects of the syntax of courtly life.

BOLINGBROKE: How long a time lies in one little word![23]
Four lagging winters and four wanton springs
End in a word: such is the breath of kings (I. 3. 213–215)

That little word for Mowbray means a lifetime – a sentence that takes away the true "harmony" of life: his "native English". As he complains: "What is thy sentence then but speechless death, / Which robs my tongue from breathing native breath?"(I. 3. 172–173)

The triumph of words over actions in *Richard II* functions on multiple levels: it not onlymanifests itselfin linguistic and stylistic exuberance of ceremonial practice but also takes further awayofthe dramatic weight of the already passiveprotagonist.[24] Richard is portrayed as a word-driven king who often "basely yielded

[21] According to Traversi, "the varied use of poetic artifice for dramatic ends is characteristic of Richard II. The very elaboration of the conflicting expressions of defiance points to an emptiness which is filled, on the plane of action, by less respectable political motives, and Richard's own regality can turn, and will do so repeatedly, into a kind of bored indifference which is rooted in his weaknesses. " Traversi 1957, 16.

[22] Consider the polysemy and the etymology of the word "sentence": "From early 14th century – as „judgment rendered by God, or by one in authority; a verdict, decision in court;" from late 14th century – as „understanding, wisdom; edifying subject matter. " From late 14th century – as „subject matter or content of a letter, book, speech, etc., " also in reference to a passage in a written work. " Online Etymology Dictionary, (http://www. etymonline. com/) url. retrieved 12 April 2014.

[23] The homonymy in the verb "lie" also expresses the superiority of language over the natural pace and order of life. Time, being contained, compressed and modified in a single word cannot but "lie".

[24] Tillyard argues that "Richard is ever more concerned with how he behaves, with the fitness of his conduct to the occasion, than with what he actually does" and that it is always "the precise manner that comes before all" in his world

upon compromise / that which his noble ancestors achieved with blows"(II. 1. 254), who "spent [more time] in peace than in wars"(II. 1. 255), and whose major concern is to contemplate on his own "ceremonious duties"(III. 2. 173) instead of executing them. He is the ultimate romantic poet of his own time, peculiarly attracted to melancholy, grief anddeath, and thus almost drawn inevitably towards his very own destruction. He offers his "large kingdom for a little grave"(III. 3. 153) several times, and attempts to create a myth out of himself even before his actual death. He tries to share his fascination of words with his followers and his wife, so that they later"with good old folks" would be able to re-tell the "tale"of his "lamentable fall", which would send the hearers weeping to their beds"(V. 1. 44–45).

> RICHARD: Let's talk of graves, of worms, and epitaphs,
> Make dust our paper, and with rainy eyes
> Write sorrow on the bosom of the earth…
> Let's choose executors and talk of wills: […]
> For God's sake let us sit upon the ground,
> And tell sad stories of the death of kings – (III. 2. 145, emphasis mine)

Yeats claims that in a Shakespearean chronicle play – and in mostof the earlier works of Shakespearean criticism –"every character was to be judged by efficiency in action" and hencebeing a poet-king was very often considered simply a trait of inadequacy. Although we might accept Yeats's argument that "a man's business may at times be revelation, and not reformation",Richard's utility in the narrative (as the prime mover and centre of the English court) and within the dramatic structure (as a title hero) is questionable.[25] At the same time, if we broaden our perspective and take the inter-related corpus of Shakespeare's history plays as the focus of attention, the "usefulness" of the self-reflecting poetic confessions of King Richard II becomes clear and obvious – on a meta-level.

Richard's speech on storytelling can be interpreted asa meta-textual reference on writing and performing history plays: "talking" about "graves" and "worms" expresses thecentral theme of the royal court – that is: death itselfin its most diverse forms and manifestations, which functions as a common denominator connecting and unifying the individual story-units of Henrys and Richards. The "sad stories of the death of kings" are the history plays themselves, for which, when performed, the stage manager has to "choose executors"(actors) to enact them. The meta-textual layers of interpretationare surfacing most visibly in the wording of phrases that can be directly linked to texts: "epitaphs", "paper", "wills" and "stories" all relate to written culture and thus to playwriting itself,that is, in case of histories, to "write sorrow on the bosom of the earth".

This meta-character and the multiplicity of references on textuality, that otherwise function as strong alienating devices working against tragic identification within the structure of the play, bring us closer to a reading that justifies the notion of the fallen ideology of medieval patriarchal kingshipand which, at the same time, expresses something of the concept of shared human universals that connect individuals (including kings) in this world of mock-tragedy. As Yeats puts it:

"where means matter more than ends". Tillyard 1944, 252.

[25] Yeats 1973, 72.

> He saw, indeed, as I think, in Richard II the defeat that awaits all […] The courtly and saintly ideals of the Middle Ages were fading, and the practical ideals of the modern age had begun to threaten the unuseful dome of the sky; Merry England was fading, and yet it was not so faded that the poets could not watch the procession of the world with that untroubled sympathy for men as they are, as apart from all they do and seem, which is the substance of tragic irony.[26]

Shakespeare, through his poet-king, revealed the substance of being, behind the multiple word-layers, making the play an act of textual self-discovery in the Great Play of artistic creation.

The non-tragic dramatic hero is a mediator between the various realms of meaning withhis personal qualities contained in the overreaching metaphor of writing, not allowing him to do anything but talk – either to or about himself or about the word-world he is placed into. In his most important scene of final revelation he even compares himself to a book, "where all [his] sins are writ"(IV. 1. 275) and from which he can read out the traits and changes of his identity. We might claim that the King literally becomes a tale himself, a passive object during the process of "unkinging", as he is repeatedly deprived of his activities.

We never really see him in action neither in public nor in private domains; hisbattles in Irelandand his shameful disposal of the crown at Bolingbroke's coronation both remain in the realms of second-hand narration,[27] just as his love to the Queen, which gains dramatic body only at the very end of the play, when there is absolutely no hope to avoid separation.[28] Shakespeare's refusal to give his title hero visibility shrinks Richard's dramatic reputation even further and makes it quite difficult for the audienceto establish a long-lasting emotional attachment to him. The only dramatic action he carries out is thedouble murder he commits in his final despair, which is neither important, nor heroic, but a mere aftermath, a dramatic side-effect of his fall.

"A Local Habitation and a Name"[29]

Wordsnot only dominate the play through the objectified personality of Richard, but they have an important effect on thedramaturgical structure and spatial organisation as well. The conscious omission of important scenes, the dominance of monologuesand the constant reliance on narration as opposed to action or movement makes the play relatively static and, in its placeless stillness,space-bound. This restriction that places its focus area within the human mind, however,gives way to an extensive use of spatial metonyms related to the complex identities of the characters.[30] In the tragic history of *Richard II*, and

[26] Yeats 1973, 72–73. (emphasis mine)

[27] "GREEN: I hope the king has not yet shipped for Ireland"(II. 2. 42); "YORK: Where did I leave? DUCHESS: At that sad stop, my lord, / Where rude misgoverned hands from windows' tops, / Threw dust and rubbish on King Richard's head. YORK: Then, as I said, the duke, great Bolingbroke…"(V. 2. 4–8)

[28] When we see them together for the first time, they are already talking about their separation: "come on, our queen, to-morrow must we part"(II. 1. 222), and when we are acquainted with the true feelings of the queen in Act II, the king is already missing – "more's not seen" than it should be. (II. 2. 25)

[29] See A Midsummer Night's Dream V. 1. 18.

[30] As a device emphasising the individual, subjective point of view of characters, these self-defining "inner spaces" link the play to the world of the great tragedies. Following the lines of Marcell Gellért's argument in his article on the "topography" and identity-relations of royal tragedies,we can claim that the identity-confusion in Richard II – just as in Macbeth – is primarily induced by private and social space-changes. As Gellért phrases it: "It is commonplace of theories of space that every order is fundamentally spatial order, which means that the primordial domain of disorder is also space and location.

essentially in every English chronicle play,spatiality is expressed by nominal terms, and names are the places to which identities are assigned. History plays are essentially restricted concerning space: the location is set (the "sacred soil" of England[31]), and the roles of court representatives are given based on the geographical locations they are committed to. The personal and social identities of the king and the Norfolks, Yorks and Northumberlands are thus primarily defined by their very names, which degrades their characters tomere title-bearers, acting in the word-driven world of seeming and superficiality.

On the stage of history and title-bearing everything has its proper place and name, but the content, the inner realms behind nominal signifiers and attributes are in constant flux. It is very much like the set roles of a play, where the actors are changing from performance to performance but the characters and the plot remain fixed.[32] This is again a very important meta-theatrical aspect that features in the structure of every history play of Shakespeare, and is put into the foreground in *Richard II* to exemplify the effect of name-bound restrictions on human identities and show the irrevocable consequences of being deprived of these.

When "an immortal title" is addedto his crown (I. 1. 24), the king literally *becomes*hiscountry and his nation. This union of place, name and the already divided plural body of the king is best described in Gaunt's monologue in Act II:

This royal throne of kings, this scept'red isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise,
This fortress built by Nature herself
Against infection and the hand of war,
This happy breed of men, this little world[33],

In radical tragedy spatial relations reflect not only different degrees of order and disorder – the external state of human affairs – but also the existential status of the tragic individual seeking self-definition. " Gellért 2006, 56.
For a more elaborated analysis on the dramaturgy of theatrical space in Shakespeare's plays see Gellért's PhD dissertation: A színház dramaturgiai térképe Shakespeare királytragédiáinak tükrében. 2008. ELTE BTK Irodalomtudományi Doktori Iskola, Angol Reneszánsz és Barokk Program. Budapest.

[31] Apart from the nominal positions mentioned above, another pars pro toto variation of spatial metonyms is also characteristically present in the play; the English soil standing for the whole of the noble English nation, which is often completed with extended metaphors, usually personifications. „Dear earth, I do salute thee with my hand, / Though rebels wound thee with their horses' hoofs. / As a long-parted mother with her child / Plays fondly with her tears and smiles in meeting. / So weeping, smiling, greet I thee"(III. 2. 6–10); "This earth shall have a feeling"(III. 2. 6–24.)
Other metaphors of place in the play follow a reversed pattern: personal character traits, human behaviours and the changes in their emotional and social status are very often marked by "external projections" relating to spatiality. As Traversi points out, when "Richard takes up the image already applied to him by Bolingbroke" and says "Down, down I come, like glist'ringPaethon", he compares himself to the setting the sun, whose movement his downfall mirrors. Traversi 1957, 38.
During the process of downgrading "his Highness"(I. 1. 127) loses the "unstooping firmness" of his "upright soul"(I. 1. 121.), has to "ascend the regal throne"(IV. 1. 113) and "come down" to the "base court", letting his "gross flesh sinkdownward" there "to die". (V. 4. 112) (emphasis mine).

[32] Frye claims that for Shakespeare "the question of identity is connected with social function and behaviour; in other words with the dramatic self, not with some hidden inner essence. "Frye 1986, 60.
I think it is only partly true; Shakespeare does focus on "the hidden essence", but he shows it through the realms of playacting – the latter being not the end but the means of expression.

[33] The notion of "the little world of man" can here refer to England as a separate, paradise-like micro-world (in which, of course the sun's equivalent is the king), or it can have another interpretation meaning man being one little, self-containing world himself. "Not only did man constitute in himself one of the planes of creation, but he was the microcosm, the sum in little of the great world itself. […] The constitution of his body duplicated the constitution of the earth" Tillyard 1944, 16.
Lily B. Campbell dedicated a whole chapter ("This Little World. Man as microcosmos.") to the topic of "microcosmography"

This precious stone set in the silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall,
[…]This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England (II. 1. 4–60)

England, that according to Gaunt "hath made a shameful conquest of itself"(II. 1. 66) under the reign of Richard II, is inhabited by the plural body of its sovereign and his subjects, and is thus the ultimate container of their shared, localised identities. When the subjected individuals are misplaced from their local habitations and their names have to be renounced, they lose their public bodies, with only the "core", the private self remaining. If the latter is unstable or ambiguous, their identities caneasily bedispersed.

In Act I, after Mowbray receives his sentence to be exiled from his native land for life, he falls into despair and seems to beoverwhelmed with grief to an extentwhich, without the supposed inconsistencies of his identity, would otherwise be utterlyunnatural. "Then thus I turn me from my country's light, / To dwell in solemn shades of endless night."(I. 3. 176) He also refers to losing his name as equal to be banished from heaven:

if ever I were a traitor,
My name be blotted from the book of life,
And I from heaven banish'd as from hence! (I. 3. 160–202)

In case of the title hero, it is the inconsistency of the "king's two bodies" and Richard's disability to reside in his own nominal identity thatbrings about his downfall.[34] He lets his plural body be inhabited by"a thousand flatterers" who"sit within [his] crown"(II. 1. 100) and gives his social self and public name away by spatio-nominal multiplication.[35] With his name and title being scattered and shared– as a mere "landlord of England"(II. 1. 115), according to Gaunt – he is constantly threatened of being displaced from where he resides, which would mean that he finally has to explore and expose his true, inner self.[36] The only problem is that Richard's character was drawn to match the image of the human-king – showing the audience and the outside world that he is nothing more and nothing less than a completely ordinary human being, whose greatest weakness is his incapability to *seem* and *be* at the same time.

Just as a good actor, the players of the ever-recurring dramatic ritual of history need to have a strong

in her book, Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes: Slaves of Passion. 1961. Methuen & Co. Ltd. London. 50.

[34] The conflicting duality of private and public is pointedly described in his last scene with his wife: "Doubly divorced! Bad men, you violate / A twofold marriage – 'twixt my crown and me, / And then betwixt me and my married wife"(V. 1. 72) Frye explains this inconsistency by estimating the practical value of Richard's bodies: "If the individual man is A, and the symbol of the nation as a single body is B", then "the stronger the king is as an individual, and the more ability he has, the more nearly A will equal B, and the better off both the king and his society will be. In any case, whether A equals B or not, it is clear that A minus B equals nothing, and thatequation is echoed in the words "all" and "nothing" that run though the abdication scene, and in fact are continuing as late as King Lear." Frye 1986, 64.

[35] "Is not the king's name twenty thousand names?"(III. 2. 85)

[36] This dispersal of Richard's public body is analogous with King Lear's tragic narrative: the latter also divides his plural self by dividing and distributing his territories – the land that stands for the sacred body of the sovereign -, and with this step lets his identity be confused and subverted. Because of his superficial relationship with (two of) his daughters, finding his true private self is difficult and painful, and can only be done when even the remnants of his kingly titles and attributes are completely taken off.

base, a centre, which enables them to wear their role-garments with true inspiration and an untroubled soul. The part of the English sovereign is always the most complex and thus extremely difficult to play: he not only has to play his part, but share it with all his fellow-players with the sad certainty that it must sooner or later be given up.

Richard is not a good player. He lacks the firm inner centre that would help him cope with the multiple roles and constant mask-wearing of his title. The play, hence, is actually built upon something, which is quite clearly not there; it is a story enclosed around a visible and tangible absence. It is the queen who first phrases this, although she is not entirely sure about the nature of her feelings and about the possible consequences they might foreshadow.

> Some unborn sorrow ripe in Fortune's womb
> Is coming towards me, and my inward soul
> With nothing trembles; at something it grieves (II. 2. 10–12)

She is talking from her "inward soul", the place where her true private self is located, and which is certainly empty at this point in case of the king. Richard's singular identity is described as a sensible "nothing" that trembles with her wife's soul, which is thus unconsciously moved to feel grief for the unavoidable "something" this emptiness is destined to bring about.

> BUSHY: Each substance of a grief hath twenty shadows
> Which shows like grief itself, but is not so.
> For sorrow's eye, glazed with blinding tears,
> Divides one thing entire to many objects,
> Like perspectives, which, rightly gaz'd upon,
> Show nothing but confusion (II. 2. 14–18)

Bushy's reaction can be read as a direct reference on the king's confused bodies: the "substance" is the "inward soul", the private self of the king – and the firm base of an actor – that has multiple outward manifestations showing something like itself, "but is not so", the latter being only roles that his title requires him to play. "Sorrow" can be a revealing metaphor for the king himself as he is the one who is "dividing" his entire crown – that is his being – to "many objects".[37] His fall, the very play itselfthat this division motivates if "rightly gazed upon" by the audience, shows "nothing but confusion". This is the gist of the most probable Shakespearean interpretation of the sequence of history plays as a whole.

The Final Act of a Poet-King

The visible meta-textual qualities and the deliberate misuse of tragic devices bring us to a conclusion that*Richard II*is a play first and foremost about itself. It isovertly self-referential on basically every possible level:within the narrative of the play it is about an ordinary human being who has to play king, who is played by an actoroutside the narrative, whose task is to play kings in history plays. It is an extremely complicated double meta-layer already, which is further extended by*Richard II*

[37] We can come to the conclusion that Richard himself, as an allegorical representation, is a personified realisation of "sorrow" if we understand the queen's lines as references on the king being displaced by Bolingbroke: "So, Greene, thou art the midwife to my woe, / and Bolingbroke my sorrow's dismal heir"(II. 2. 6. 2).

being a play of reference on the other history plays of Shakespeare, just as on history, on artistic expression and on life in general. A play about playing can thus be most thoroughly interpreted if we take meta-theatricality as a looking glass, whose transparent yet reflective surfacecan showall other aspects mentioned above in a better light.

It is Shakespeare's dramatic judgement, following the lines of the "Theatrum Mundi" doctrine, which becomes clearly obvious in history plays: a poet-king, who is unable to act and thus cannot fulfil his tasks required by his nominal position, is determined to fall. Richard's contemplation on his own part prevents him from playing it, and hence his aspiring followers can easily steal his show. He lacks Bolingbroke's talent to become a person of pretence, which disables him to make use of the most important inherent attribute of his position: his visibility. He feels the threateningly increasing popularity ofhis cousin from the very beginning, and phrases his fear highlighting Bolingbroke's ability to win people's sympathy through his appearance.

> How he did seemto dive into their hearts
> With humble and familiar courtesy;
> What reverence he did throw away on slaves,
> Wooing poor craftsmen with the craft of smiles
> And patient underbearing of his fortune,
> As'twere to banish their affects with him. (I. 4. 25–30, emphasis mine)

With "smiles", "familiar courtesy" and fair "reverence" Bolingbroke proved a mastery of seeming, and thus justified his rightful demand for the crown. As for Richard, however hard he tries, he is completely unable to fulfil the expectations of his "internal" audience, and his "fair show" can easily be "stained", as he is only admired when he is "not himself"(II. 1. 242) and only "looks like a king"(III. 3. 68). He is even instructed not to give himself away by looking inside the private realms of his being: "Be not thyself. For how art thou a king / But by fair sequence and succession?"[38] The succession of kings does not require anything else, just "fair play" – in its theatrical sense.

To emphasise the general perspective of the anti-tragic and the self-referential and to express the multi-layered complexity ofthe dramaturgical structure of the play, Shakespeareemploys the strongest weapon that a playwright could ever use against his own protagonist: he makes him a bad actor. Apart from displacing him from the heart of the action and keeping him passively in the domains of mere words and narration for the most part of the play, his dramatic body is further weakened when he is actually on stage and has the chance to try and win his audience. Instead of playing "in one person many people"(V. 5. 31), he is constantly being out-played by others, and is immediately forgotten by his people after his actual de-crowning takes place.

> As in theatre the eyes of men,
> After a well-graced actor leaves the stage,
> Are idly bent on him that next,

[38] These lines of York originally refer to his disapproval of Richard seizing Bolingbroke's rights and Gaunt's lands, but they can have a secondary meaning, relating to the difference between the temper and character traits of the king and his cousin. As Tillyard puts it: "Henry belongs to a new order, where action is quick and leads somewhere", and is in fact in correspondence with the overall idea of an acting king in an acting world. Tillyard 1944, 258.

Thinking his prattle to be tedious (V. 2. 24)[39]

Furthermore, the rendering of the plot itself takes great emphasis off, and thus completely trivialises, Richard's last great scene, as the insignificant episode of Aumerle's precluded treachery breaks the line of emotional attachment with the fallen king.[40] Even the possibility of a tragedy is gone – as Bolingbroke says: "Our scene is alt'red from a serious thing, / And now chang'd to 'The Beggar and the King' (V. 3. 79) ; in which Richard plays both roles.[41] And of course, he plays them badly.

Positioning a bad actor at the centre of a play is not just relatively unusual but simply hazardous. The risks of the "double play" will always put a great pressure on the lead actor, and can also make the reception of the play highly ambiguous. As István Géher puts it, Richard has two audiences to play to: one on and another off stage, and while the former remains indifferent, the latter is (or should be) amazed by his private act.[42] In this duality lies thewonderful multi-faceted complexity of the dramatic structure: only by sacrificing the magnitude and the dramatic reliability of the hero can the play speak for itself, only through complete stylistic and functional alienation can the world of acting be made clearly visible– through the eyes of an outsider, a poet, who has already been disposed of all his attributes that had restricted him within the bound realms ofseeming and pretence. Looking out from the ever-present acting-world is self-discovery.

The un-poetic, hollow "nothing" slowly starts to gather "substance" after the king "forgets himself", anddirectly addresses the audience in Act III, scene 2, opening his monologue with the claim: "No matter where – of comfort no man speak"(III. 2. 144). Afterenlistinga multitude of textual references,[43] he makes clear remarks on the genre of history plays – how kings are "depos'd", "slain in war" and "haunted by the ghosts they have deposed" – and on their inevitable conclusion:

All murthered – for within the hollow crown
That rounds the mortal temples of a king
Keeps death his court (III. 2. 160–162)

– where the king is only allowed "a little scene, to monarchize" and "to kill with looks" through "vain conceit". He makes it clear that the king is nothing more than an actor, a "self-conscious shadow

[39] It is important to mention that, as opposed to the narrative order of de-crowning, in this passage the "well-graced actor" who gives his place to his fellow-actor is Bolingbroke. These lines, being part of a narration, follow the order of events in the "play within the play", but also point out the already known and felt difference between the acting abilities of Richard II and the future Henry IV.

[40] Charlton claims that "it is in fact a real dramatic problem for Shakespeare in the latter part of the play to prevent the pathetic weakness of Richard from forfeiting the sympathetic interest of the audience: his hero is in danger of becoming too maudlinly insignificant to excite compassionate lookers-on to a deep concern in his fate." Charlton 1948, 45–46.

I think it was not a dramatic problem but Shakespeare's concern to do so, in order to emphasise the meta-theatrical and meta-textual layers of Richard II and to show the inter-relatedness of the play with the other narratives within the "Grand Mechanism" of history.

[41] According to Peter Ure's notes in the Arden edition, this is "probably a reference to the ballad of King Cophetua and the Beggar-Maid."(163) This might mean that the corruption of Richard's final act not only degrades the given scene but the whole play to the level of a mere popular story.

[42] Géher 1998, 73.

[43] See the second chapter.

rather than the substance of authority", whose part cannot but conclude in un-tragic death.[1]At this point, he wants to quit and put down his mask, as after all there is no need to "mock" "flesh and blood" by playing kings and letting ourselvesbe out-played by others; we should show the truth instead and "throw away respect, / Tradition, form and ceremonious duty". Richard, whom the audience have "mistook" all the while, wants to"pine away" and "hide his head" from his "inner" audience, but the painful process of "unkinging" has to be played out, the final words pointing to his (and our) inner self have to be spoken in the last ceremony of self-reflection. To conduct it, he has no company; he has to be "both priest and clerk" as otherwise there would be "no one [to] say amen". Slowly he himself becomes his own audience as he "turns [his] eyes upon himself"(IV. 1. 247), and through the mirror he is faced with "the shadow of his face" – with the very play written about and being played around him; with the "book, where all his sins are writ", that is, in fact, "himself".

Where the "substance" lies, however, he only finds when he accepts the fact that neither he, "nor any man but man is, / With nothing shall be pleased, till he be eased / With being nothing"(V. 5. 39). The revelation is as "sour sweet"(V. 5. 42) as the music he hears in his last moments; it gives nothing, takes nothing and promises nothing. The end is still no end: the poet-actor can never havehis privacy, even if his only wish is to be out "from our sights". King's lives are destined to be exposed and shared with the audience, let it be onor off the stage. It is the reason why the Groom, a strange meta-character of the on-stage audience, arrives in the last scene – "to look upon"his"sometimes royal master's face"(V. 5. 75) before the curtain falls down, and the show goes on.

[1] Traversi 1957, 18.

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