

2009

Kingship in Shakespeare's Second Tetralogy: The Amalgamation of Divine Right and Might

Danielle Marler '09
Lake Forest College

Follow this and additional works at: http://publications.lakeforest.edu/allcollege_writing_contest



Part of the [Literature in English, British Isles Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Marler, Danielle '09, "Kingship in Shakespeare's Second Tetralogy: The Amalgamation of Divine Right and Might" (2009). *All-College Writing Contest*.

http://publications.lakeforest.edu/allcollege_writing_contest/4

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Lake Forest College Publications. It has been accepted for inclusion in All-College Writing Contest by an authorized administrator of Lake Forest College Publications. For more information, please contact levinson@lakeforest.edu.

Professor McCracken

Politics 353

Kingship in Shakespeare's Second Tetralogy: The Amalgamation of Divine Right and Might

Shakespeare's second tetralogy, comprised of *Richard II*, *Henry IV, Parts I and II*, and *Henry V*, concerns the re-envisioning of the monarchy. *Richard II* focuses on the overthrow of a corrupt monarch by one of his subjects, Bolingbroke. As Bolingbroke increasingly becomes a threat, the legitimacy of the unscrupulous Richard II's (hereinafter Richard) crown diminishes. Eventually, Bolingbroke gains enough support from the nobles in order to force Richard's abdication. The saga is continued in *King Henry IV, Part I* and *Part II* where all has not gone well for England after King Henry IV's¹ succession. King Henry IV's unlawful and violent ascension to the throne has placed England in state of upheaval because he has unwittingly obliterated the one concept that protected kings from endless rebellion: the divinity of the king. Because of the throne's loss of divinity, King Henry IV's reign is plagued by internal strife that culminates in an uprising known as the Battle of Shrewsbury. *Henry V* focuses on the new king's attempt to legitimize his rule by fusing the notion of the divine with the necessity of military might. One would intuitively believe that the removal of a corrupt monarch would ensure stability to the realm, but by shattering the king's divine image, the kingdom suffers even greater. Removing the god-like attributes of the king encourages rebellion because the usurpers are no longer opposing a god, merely a man. The solution to this perpetuating cycle of rebellion, as evidenced in *Henry V*, is to dissolve the dichotomous relationship between divine right and military might, thus, assimilating both into the kingship.

Early in the play, before Bolingbroke becomes a serious threat, Richard's fall from grace is most succinctly predicted and voiced by the Welsh Captain:

¹ After Bolingbroke ascends to the throne he will henceforth be known as King Henry IV.

Professor McCracken

Politics 353

'Tis thought the King is dead. We will not stay.
 The bay trees in our country are all withered,
 And meteors fright the fixed stars of heaven;
 The pale-faced moon looks bloody on earth,
 And lean-looked prophets whisper fearful change;
 Rich men look sad, and ruffians dance and leap,
 The one in fear to lose what they enjoy,
 The other to enjoy by rage and war.
 These signs forerun the death of kings.
 Farewell. Our countrymen are fled,
 As well assured Richard their King is dead. (R, I.iv. 7-17)²

During Richard's absence, Bolingbroke has returned to England prior to the end of his banishment. The purpose of Bolingbroke's return is to reclaim what he rightly should have inherited from his father, John of Gaunt. Bolingbroke's only recourse is to make an attempt for the throne; thus, he gathers supporters to try to depose Richard (R, II.iii.132-140). Above, the Welsh Captain is telling Salisbury that he is withdrawing his troops because "the King is dead" (R, II.iv.7). At first glance the Welsh Captain can be interpreted as implying that Richard has been killed in the war in Ireland because he has not yet returned. Taking this passage in the context of the play as a whole, it seems apparent that the Welsh Captain is expressing that Richard's mystical qualities, his divinity, is what has died, not Richard's physical body.

Upon Richard's return to England, there is a scene in which he greets the earth. During this scene Richard lovingly embraces the ground much as a mother would greet her child. He treats nature as if it is a part of him; he acts as if he has some mystical connection to nature through his perceived divinity. Richard instructs the earth to: "feed not thy sovereign's foe, my gentle earth/nor with thy sweets comfort his ravenous sense" (R, III.ii.12-13). Richard views the earth as an extension of himself and, therefore, under his control. Simply, he is speaking as if the

² The 'R' indicates that *Richard II* is being referenced.

Professor McCracken

Politics 353

earth must bend to his will and therefore grant neither its comforts nor its advantages to the usurpers. This control over nature ties into one of the play's central themes: the divinity of kings.

While Richard's divinity is an integral aspect of the play, it is more important to understand the circumstances that erode his divinity. The Welsh Captain uses Richard's mystical nexus with nature to illustrate the ever-progressive deterioration of Richard's divinity (R, II.iv.7-8). Here Richard's legitimacy as a ruler, and namely his divine right to rule, is depicted as withering, rotting, and dying. The decay of the crown is mentioned earlier in the play by the dying John of Gaunt when he speaks of Richard's extreme excesses. John of Gaunt says that minor excesses, although detrimental to the King's legitimacy, will be tolerated whereas the extravagant indulgences that Richard partakes, will hasten the decay of his divinity (R, II.i.37-44).

The Welsh Captain builds upon this theme of eroding divinity by remarking that the heavens, once teeming with luminous stars, are now home to fiery meteors (R, II.iv.8). England is represented by the heavens with Richard fulfilling the role of God. This analogy further strengthens the mystical perception of the King by placing the King on an equal level with God. Prior to Bolingbroke's return, England is described as being full of stars. These stars are representative of the peace, albeit a corrupt and tenuous peace, that England was experiencing. Even though Richard was clearly acting in his best interests rather than in the interests of his subjects, there was no challenge to his god-given authority. Because Bolingbroke defies Richard's order of banishment and returns, the peace that England was experiencing is shattered. Instead of heaven being full of stars, it becomes full of meteors, which are powerful and destructive. The reappearance of Bolingbroke signals that the way the King is viewed, as well as

Professor McCracken

Politics 353

the condition of England itself, is about to change. The meteors, of which the Welsh Captain speaks, being analogous to Bolingbroke and his supporters, will transform the power of the King from that of divine right to the power of might.

The Welsh Captain's language alludes to Richard's two personas—the divine and the mortal—a concept Ernst Kantorowicz focuses on in his book *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*. Applying Kantorowicz's theory of the king's two bodies, one can deduce that the Welsh Captain is stating that Richard himself is not dead; rather, he is no longer revered as a god. Stated differently, the Welsh Captain maintains that Richard is no longer viewed as god-like, but as a man. Because of the decline of Richard's majestic powers, the Welsh Captain does not believe that Richard will have the necessary power as a mere mortal to overcome Bolingbroke and his supporters, whom the Welsh Captain refers to as "ruffians" (R II.iv.12). Although he predicts these usurpers will come to power, he does not view them as legitimate leaders. The Welsh Captain stays a firm believer in the divine right of Richard to rule even though he knows that this particular vision of Richard is transforming. Calling the usurpers ruffians, thugs, shows that they are not more legitimate than the divine king, but they are more powerful than the mortal king. The Welsh Captain inevitably withdraws his troops, not because Richard is no longer ordained by God, but, instead, because Richard's subjects no longer believe him to be god-like. This shift in the perception of Richard signals a shift in how monarchs will be perceived altogether. Kings will no longer be able to cling to some mystical nexus with God in order to defend their rule. Instead, kings will have to fight off potential usurpers to maintain their position.

Professor McCracken

Politics 353

Kantorowicz would argue that Richard's fall from grace is not due to change in his subjects' perception of him. He would contend that Richard did not, in fact, acquire any god-like characteristics, and it is for that reason Bolingbroke ascends to the throne as easily as he does. According to Kantorowicz, the King obtains these two bodies by either ceasing to be a simple mortal or becoming "eternal" through the unity and perpetuity of his kingdom (271-272). We can eliminate the first pathway to divinity because it is blatantly obvious that Richard did not cease to be a mere mortal. There are numerous references to Richard's status of a mere mortal including John of Gaunt's deathbed speech on Richard's frivolous vanity, Bolingbroke's exposition of Richard's susceptibility to external influence during Bushy and Green's sentencing, and finally, in Richard's pure selfishness and greediness in exploiting John of Gaunt's death. (R, II.i.43; R, III.i.8; R, I.iv.60-66). Admittedly, though, it is interesting to see how Richard ardently believes that he is god-like. He fervently maintains his divinity even as he is relinquishing his crown. He reluctantly consents to surrender his crown, and as he does, he states that by doing so he's "made glory base and sovereignty a slave/proud majesty a subject, state a peasant" (R, IV.i.262-263). One can see that Richard exhibited many qualities that contradicted his claim of divinity. Thus, it seems that any nexus with divinity that Richard has must come from his inheritance of the throne because he most certainly did not, in practice, emulate any god-like attributes. Therefore, as Kantorowicz would argue, the King's ability to create a united, perpetual kingdom is more significant in maintaining power than any hereditary claim to the throne.

Because Richard's divinity does not come from being inherently above mere mortals, his divinity, if he is divine at all, must come from the unity of his subjects with the crown.

Professor McCracken

Politics 353

Maintaining a united realm is crucial to attaining a god-like status because it is the perpetual unity of the realm that makes the concept of a king immortal. Kantorowicz believes that Christ naturally has two bodies, the spiritual and the mortal, and thus, his position as head of the Church is everlasting (271). There is no need for Christ to ensure people are united with the Church because he facilitates the eternity of the Church through his own divinity. Richard, on the other hand, must develop some eternal notion that will bind his subjects to the crown if he is to attain a divine status analogous to Christ.

Kantorowicz identifies three eternity values that help unify kingdoms: grace, justice, and law (271-272). The play illustrates that grace is a part of the unity of the England because both Richard and the Bishop of Carlisle are ardent supporters of the idea that Kings rule by the grace of God. The Bishop of Carlisle explicitly voices in his plea to Bolingbroke that Richard is God's "captain, steward, [and] deputy elect" (R, IV.i.132). The Bishop is chastising Bolingbroke for trying to usurp the crown because he is going against a divine ruler who was appointed by God himself to rule England. Hence, by opposing Richard, Bolingbroke is opposing God. Richard himself expresses his grace in his Divine Right Speech, particularly by the oft quoted: "Not all the water in the rough rude sea/Can wash the balm off from an anointed king./The breath of worldly men cannot depose/The deputy elected by the Lord" (R, III.ii.55-58). Richard believes that once a king is ordained by God, commonly determined by inheriting the crown, the only way to remove said king from power is by God; for what mortal can supersede God's authority? Sadly for Richard, grace is not enough to keep him in power because Bolingbroke is able to depose him. Because Richard's grace was so easily overcome by Bolingbroke, it would appear that justice and law are the eternity-values that better unite and maintain a kingdom.

Professor McCracken

Politics 353

But what role do the eternity-values of justice and law play in Richard's kingdom? Justice, as outlined by Kantorowicz, is to defend a country as well as its subjects. Put differently, the just cause would be the cause of a country (Kantorowicz 248). Here one can see that Richard's rule was not just. Richard ruled in the interests of himself and of his friends, not in the interests of England. One example of these injustices is illustrated when Northumberland, Willoughby, and Ross discuss the injustice inflicted upon Bolingbroke by denying him what he should have rightfully inherited from John of Gaunt (R, II.i.236). By refusing Bolingbroke his birthright, Richard is provoking a response from the banished Bolingbroke. This provocation certainly is not one of England's causes because such disputes threaten the country's peace. Similarly, Richard's kingdom did not uphold a consistent rule of law. By unlawfully seizing the effects of John of Gaunt in order to fund his war with Ireland, Richard removed himself from the realm of law. Certainly a sovereign and anointed ruler like Richard wields great power, but not even he can trespass on divine and natural laws (Bodin 13). This attempt at operating beyond the boundaries of the law was most likely a tactic used by Richard to get his subjects to see him as a god-like figure: Richard was trying his hand at omnipotence. By overstepping his human confines and transgressing upon the laws on which his authority rests, he is, in a sense, denying his own legal right to rule (Baines 25). Thus, the distance that Richard took great strides to create between his subjects and himself backfired because, instead of appearing god-like, he was perceived as being merely a greedy mortal, a tyrant with no legitimate authority.

The Welsh Captain implies that Richard's source of sovereignty, his divinity, is dead. Richard has finally been seen as what he truly is: a mortal. Due to the egregiousness of Richard's offenses, Bolingbroke and his followers no longer believe him to be of two bodies.

Professor McCracken

Politics 353

Bolingbroke's position is that Richard has no link to divinity. Richard's unscrupulous actions make it possible for Bolingbroke to dethrone Richard because he is not opposing a god; Bolingbroke is opposing a man. Bolingbroke envisions Richard as a greedy man who benefited from the myth of the divine right of Kings. The Welsh Captain would disagree with Bolingbroke and instead argue that Richard did indeed have two bodies but that Richard's careless acts have caused his human body to overshadow and eventually devour his mystical body. However one interprets Richard's divinity, it must certainly be viewed as integral to the internal stability of the country because England suffers greatly from removing that mystical aspect from the king's identity.

Henry IV's ascension does not instill peace in the kingdom even though he has deposed his corrupt predecessor. Because of Richard's overthrow, England is thrust into a bloody civil war (1H, I.i.5-7)³. There is more fervent rebellion because people are no longer as distanced from the king as they once were. Henry IV shows that any person can become king; one does not have to be God's deputy to become king. In fact, Henry IV embraces his status as a man and actively resists any association between the king and God. When Henry IV meets with Northumberland, Worcester, and Hotspur to discuss the prisoners Hotspur has captured, Henry IV does not pretend to have any divine attributes, but he does insist upon his superiority. He maintains that he will no longer place himself at the level of the nobles and will re-emphasize his might (1H, I.iii.4-9). But Henry IV later contradicts himself when he is speaking with Prince Henry, later Henry V, about how he was successful in removing the corrupt Richard from power. Henry IV asserts that Richard led to his own ruin by placing himself in the public eye too often,

³'1H' indicates that *Henry IV, Part 1* is being referenced.

Professor McCracken

Politics 353

by trying to sway his subjects into believing in his divinity. The King tells Prince Henry that Richard was:

Heard, not regarded; seen, but with such eyes,
As, sick and blunted with community,
Afford no extraordinary gaze
Such as is bent on sunlike majesty
When it shines seldom in admiring eyes,
But rather drowsed and hung their eyelids down (1H, III.ii.76-81)

Here, Henry IV posits that he gained a mystical quality himself that fueled the image of divinity because he did not show himself enough to refute it; he was not in the public eye enough to illustrate his mortality. Because Richard appeared in public so often, he began to desensitize his subjects. In the public's mind, Henry IV appeared more divine because he, like the sun, appeared and then went away. While Henry IV whole-heartedly rejects incorporating divinity into the image of the kingship, and in fact rebelled against it when Richard was king, he certainly benefited, at least initially, by the public's transference of divinity from Richard to himself.

Although Henry IV is a powerful king with a huge army, the fact that he disavows any relationship with the divine ultimately weakens his authority and breeds rebellion. The leaders of the rebellion against Henry IV's rule are compared to meteors and comets throughout *Henry IV, Part I* much like Henry IV and his fellow usurpers were by the Welsh Captain (1H, III.i.13; 1H, III.ii.47; 1H, V.i.19; R, II.iv.9). This comparison is significant because it illustrates the seriousness of Richard's deposition. Because Henry IV stripped the kingship of its divinity by forcing Richard's abdication, he has unknowingly removed the one safeguard of the kingship. Transitioning the monarchy into a position of might further disrupts the peace of England instead of restoring it. Henry IV's overthrow of Richard makes it possible for any person, of any

Professor McCracken

Politics 353

bloodline, of any status, to proclaim the king unjust and proceed to challenge the king's authority to rule. This shift in perception causes the throne to be under a perpetual challenge for the kingship and will belong to any person who can best the king, a king who is no more god-like than any of the challengers.

In order to provide stability to the realm and to Henry IV's kingship, his legitimacy rests on his ability to establish the eternity-values that Kantorowicz names (271-272). Obviously Henry IV does not rely on grace to sustain his rule because his removal of Richard fervently rejects any mystical connection the crown has with divinity. Law and justice were the eternity-values that Henry IV focused on during the early phases of his conquest for the throne. When Henry IV (then Bolingbroke) first returned from his banishment, he told the nobles that he was not interested in pursuing the crown, rather he only wanted to reclaim what he should have rightly inherited upon his father's, John of Gaunt's, death (1H, IV.iii.61-65). Even though he was not openly vying for the throne, Henry IV was still embracing the eternity-values of law and justice. But Henry IV's virtue was quickly engulfed by the temptation of power once he began to gain the confidence and support of the other nobles. Once he was crowned king, Henry IV abruptly turned his back on the values he had once cherished and, instead, behaved in a fashion similar to the corrupt Richard. Henry IV raised taxes throughout the kingdom, beheaded all of Richard's loyal deputies, and disregarded Richard's true successor to the crown, the Earl of March, altogether (1H, IV.iii.87-98). The rejection of divinity and the inability to promote any of the eternity-values that Kantorowicz outlines ensure that England will be beset with violence and instability.

Professor McCracken

Politics 353

The violence plaguing England in *Henry IV, Part I* does not end with Henry IV's victory at the Battle of Shrewsbury but is continued in *Henry IV, Part II* with Northumberland's and the Archbishop of York's uprising. The King's military strength is not a deterrent against further opposition as one would instinctively believe it to be. Instead, the defeat has strengthened the opposition to the King (2H, I.i.182-188)⁴. The principle figure in the rebellion is the Archbishop of York who exhibits the two-bodies that Richard was so desperately seeking to attain. The Archbishop of York uses his dualism in order to perpetuate the rebellion despite the military might of the king. When the conspirators are meeting to discuss their upcoming show of resistance, Morton describes the effectiveness of the Archbishop of York's duality:

With well-appointed powers. He is a man
Who with a double surety binds his followers.
My lord your son had only but the corpse,
But the shadows and shows of men, to fight;
For that same word "rebellion did divide
The action of their bodies from their souls (2H, I.i.192-197)

Morton is explaining that it is the divine and the mortal bodies of the Archbishop of York acting in concert that enables the Archbishop to enlist support for their rebellion. Because the newly enlisted are fighting with both their hearts and their bodies, unlike the soldiers in the Battle of Shrewsbury, they will be able to defeat Henry IV's army. Under Hotspur's command in the Battle of Shrewsbury, the men fighting were not actively involved in the resistance; the recruits were merely fighting because they were enlisted. The two bodies of the Archbishop of York will unite the soldiers with a common cause, which according to Morton, will enable them to prevail against Henry IV. Moreover, it is the unitary nature of the kingship under Henry IV that fails to

⁴ '2H' signifies that *Henry IV, Part II* is being referenced.

Professor McCracken

Politics 353

stifle rebellion and, in fact, encourages those who do embrace their two bodies to maintain the ongoing internal conflict.

Crucial to the two *Henry IV* plays is the fact that Henry IV openly rejects any connection his kingship has with the divine. Henry IV's deathbed speech to his heir, Prince Henry, describes how Henry IV usurped the throne from Richard rather than being appointed to the throne by God. Henry describes his ascension to the kingship: "But as an honor snatched with boist'rous hand/And I had many living to upbraid/My gain of it by their assistances/Which daily grew to quarrel and to bloodshed" (2H, IV.iii.319-323). The illegality of Henry IV's claim to the kingship is undeniable even to Henry IV. His acknowledgement of his "snatching" of Richard's legitimate claim lends some credence to the idea that Richard was, as the Bishop of Carlisle describes, appointed by God.

Interestingly, Prince John (also known as Duke of Lancaster) and Prince Henry both believe that the kingship has a relationship, albeit sometimes tenuous, with divinity. When Prince John is meeting with the Archbishop and his fellow rebels on the battlefield to discuss a possible peace, he expresses his distaste for how the Archbishop has abused his position. He claims that because the Archbishop has such a strong link with God, he is abusing this link in order to gain support from the king's subjects. In particular, Prince John states that the Archbishop of York's misuse of power has robbed God's substitute, Henry IV, of his rightful subjects' loyalty by turning them against their legitimate king (2H, IV.i.251-259). Contrary to what his father believes, Prince John's view of the kingship is much closer to the view voiced by the Bishop of Carlisle regarding Henry IV's deposition of Richard (R, IV.i.132). Although

Professor McCracken

Politics 353

Henry IV himself does not condone this envisioning of the kingship, it is clear that many people, even those closest to him, are still supportive of the concept of a divine king.

Similarly, Prince Henry also believes that there is more to the kingship than just the reliance on military power. When Prince Henry is considering going to spy on Falstaff disguised as a drawer (a drink server), he ponders whether doing such would degrade his royal status. But, upon remembering that Roman gods used to disguise themselves as lowly animals, he finds that such a disguise as a drawer would not be inappropriate (2H, II.ii.149-152). The comparison is subtle, but looking closely, one can see that the young Prince is comparing those of royal position, kings, princes, etc., to gods. Such a comparison would never be made by Henry IV because the dissolution of the link between divinity and kingship is what he relied upon when seeking the throne. Prince Henry's vision of kingship is important because it is his leadership that ends England's internal turmoil, bringing stability to the kingdom. At the end of the play, Prince Henry comes into Henry IV's bedroom only to mistake him for being dead. Upon this false perception, Prince Henry takes the crown because he is the heir to the throne. As he places the crown on his head he is reestablishing some semblance of a connection between the kingship and God; he pleads to God to guard the crown, to protect his claim to the kingship from the opposition of which his father was beset. When Henry IV discover his crown is gone, he accuses Prince Henry of having stolen the crown, but Prince Henry is quick to confront this accusation by imploring his father to believe him in that he mistook his father for dead. He attempts to give the king back his crown and states, "There is your crown/And He that wears the crown immortally/Long guard it as yours" (2H, IV.iii.271-273). The "He" referenced by Prince Henry is God. The perpetuity of God, according to Prince Henry, is what provides protection to the

Professor McCracken

Politics 353

kingship, and Henry IV's disregard of this is what has caused him to have a tumultuous rule instead of the peaceful rule he had hoped to establish. The recognition of God's natural relationship with the kingship will be important aspect of Prince Henry's (hereinafter Henry V) rule of England in the final part of the tetralogy.

With Henry V's ascension to the throne, peace seems to have finally have been brought to England. Because Henry V has no internal rebellion to quell, he is able to focus on strengthening the country. The orientation of the kingships of Henry IV and Henry V are quite dissimilar. Henry IV's kingship focused solely on military strength, whereas Henry V's kingship was influenced by the divine in addition to possessing a great military power. By incorporating the relationship with God into the kingship, Henry V is fulfilling the eternity value of grace. The Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Ely discuss the new King's religious proclivities. They say that his theological knowledge is so profound that if one did not know any better, they would mistake him for a member of the clergy (5, I.i.40-43).⁵ Moreover, Henry V is frequently addressed as "your Grace" by his close followers, just as he himself addresses the Archbishop of Canterbury, a man perceived to be of two bodies (5, I.ii.127). Henry V's continually relies upon God to help him in his quest for France, and one can view Henry V's success in France, despite nearly insurmountable odds, as evidence to Henry V's grace. Barbara Baines attributes his victory in France to his transformation of the kingship: "With this image as the new king transformed by the perfecting power of divine grace, [Henry V] possesses a psychological power that enables him to lead his nation to greatness" (Baines 34). Simply put, Henry V's ability to restore the nexus between the divine and the king, even though this particular connection is not

⁵ In order to stay true to the citation scheme '5' will indicate a reference to *Henry V*

Professor McCracken

Politics 353

as strong as the relationship that Richard envisioned, is more successful in uniting a perpetual realm and attaining victory in France.

The second eternity-value that Kantorowicz espouses is that of justice. Henry V's rule was a just rule because he, while enhancing the kingship's power, was also acting in England's best interest in reclaiming France. The Archbishop of Canterbury illustrates how the current French rule is illegitimate because it derives from a female, and according to Salic Law, females are not allowed to succeed to the throne, thus removing any claim to the throne the King of France might make (5, I.ii.35-97). Henry V considers the invasion of France a necessary military action in order to strengthen England. His army, although weak and ill, are powerful because they believe in their country; they believe that this war is a legitimate exercise of the king's power. Henry V is able to gather such a committed army to pursue this just cause because he possesses the grace that unites the kingdom in a common cause. This attribute enables Henry V to enlist the hearts as well as the bodies of the men, much like the Archbishop of York was able to achieve (2H, I.i.192-197). Moreover, Henry V maintains that France belongs because it is a "gift of heaven," and as such, all he is seeking to accomplish is to reunite his kingdom (2H, II.iv.82). In keeping with Bodin's interpretation of the limits on sovereignty, there is no transgression on divine or natural law here as there was during Richard's reign, which makes this a valid exercise of power (Bodin 13). Henry V's pursuit of a unified kingdom is a legitimate and lawful enterprise that will serve only to strengthen his kingship.

In addition to grace and justice, the upholding of the law is also a hallmark of Henry V's reign. Nowhere is Henry V's commitment to the maintenance of law and order in his kingdom more evident than his treatment of his former acquaintances. Falstaff is the first friend, if one

Professor McCracken

Politics 353

could call him that, of the King that is cast aside. Falstaff's continuing abuse of his relationship with Henry V, because of Henry V's birthright, throughout Henry IV's reign is what incites the young king enough that one of his first acts as king is to banish the lecherous Falstaff (2H, V.v.59-60). Henry V, unlike Richard's protection of the underhanded Bushy and Green, does not protect people like Falstaff for that would be contrary to the rule of law. Additionally, Henry V sentences his esteemed contemporaries the Earl of Cambridge, Lord Scroop, and Thomas Grey to death upon learning of their plot with the French to assassinate Henry V before he was to set sail to France (5, II.ii.175-179). The favoritism that was rampant with Richard's reign has now been quashed, for the youthful, but wise, Henry V is seeking to ensure that his kingdom is a lawful kingdom that is self-sustaining rather than become a lawless, conflict-ridden country.

It is quite evident that Henry V was successful in establishing the eternity-values of grace, justice, and law in his kingdom, but this success is not the only difference between his kingship and the kingship of his predecessors. Unlike his father, Henry V does acknowledge the connection the kingship has with God, but he does not believe himself to be a God, as Richard believed. Instead, Henry V is solid in his resolve to assert his mortality. The clearest example of this is the fact that he seeks God's assistance and acceptance. Before the Battle of Agincourt, Henry V, whilst in disguise as a member of the army, voices to another soldier that the king is only a man and that the sensations he feels are experienced in the same way that any other mortal would feel them (5, IV.i.97-101). He is dissimilar to Richard because he does not seek to distance himself from his subjects; rather, he is seeking to lessen the distance so that his relationship with them is more natural and less hierarchical. That is not to say that Henry V

Professor McCracken

Politics 353

wants to be treated as a commoner. He merely he believes that the king should be able to relate to his subjects, thus fostering the connection with them, while, at the same time, being capable to transcend them in order to provide for the common good of the realm. The fanciful envisioning of the kingship held by Richard is rejected by Henry V because he realizes that with the crown comes a great responsibility that the king must bear. He laments that “the slave, a member of the country’s peace/Enjoys it, but in gross brain little wots/What watch the king keeps to maintain the peace/Whose hours the peasant best advantages” (5, IV.i.260-263). In Henry V’s mind, the kingship is more than just unrestrained power; it is the duty of the king to provide for the realm first and foremost even if the king is required to make substantial sacrifices. Although Richard and Henry V share an affinity for the notion of the divine kingship, they strongly diverge in how that divinity and responsibility should be wielded by the monarch.

Henry V is further compared to Richard when the Welsh Fluellen praises the king after his victory at Agincourt. Particularly, his praise is eerily reminiscent of Richard’s Divine Right Speech in that Fluellen states: “All the water in Wye cannot wash your Majesty’s Welsh/plod out of your body, I can tell you that: God bless it and/preserve it as long as it pleases his Grace and his Majesty/too” (5, IV.vii.101-105). Again the similarities between Richard and Henry V are apparent, but it is their dissimilarities in the reliance upon military might that differentiates them. Richard placed all of his power in his subjects’ perception of his divinity. When his subjects began to view Henry IV as a more legitimate king, Richard became devoid of power. In contrast, Henry V does not merely rely upon the admiration of his subjects, for power integrates the strength of his military into his kingship so that even if some begin to question his authority, the three would-be assassins are one such example, Henry V has the power to stifle this dissent

Professor McCracken

Politics 353

before it erupts into widespread violence similar to the chaos England experienced during Henry IV's reign. The assimilation of both divinity and military prowess into the kingship in addition to Henry V's ability to promote and sustain the eternity-values of grace, justice, and law is what makes Henry V's rule uniquely successful.

It is important to evaluate the differences in the kingships of Richard, Henry IV, and Henry V to truly appreciate the changes that Henry V initiated in order to create kingship that was both powerful and humble in the eyes of his subjects. Even though Richard is easily deposed by Henry IV, there is still significance about the way Richard presented his kingship. Richard's reliance on the divinity of the monarch proved to be a stabilizing factor in English rule. The country under Richard might not have been justly managed and there were indeed multiple transgressions of the law, but there was no widespread chaos plaguing the country. The usurpation of the throne causes the kingship to undergo a drastic change: "The king that 'never dies' . . . has been replaced by the king that always dies and suffers death more cruelly than other mortals" (Kantorowicz 30). This change in the perception of kingship, in addition to Henry IV's failure in establishing any of the three eternity-values (grace, justice, and law), makes the kingship vulnerable to challenge and places the country in peril.

While Henry IV does manage to best his competitors for the throne, he does so at the cost of innocent lives that would not have been lost had the country been in a more stable position. Therefore, one could argue that Richard's rule was actually the more just even though he was acting in his own self-interest. The just cause of the country is, of course, peace and stability, which is exactly what Richard maintained, albeit through contradictory means. Indeed, some citizen's rights were violated, but these transgressions were legitimized by attributing god-like

Professor McCracken

Politics 353

qualities, such as omnipotence, to the king. The cliché, “God works in mysterious ways,” justifies whatever action the king takes because it is all part of a master plan; in the case of England, that master plan is stability. Henry IV’s inheritance rights, though important, were subordinate to the will of the king, and therefore, Henry IV’s succession to the throne was illegitimate as well as problematic for England’s stability.

Henry V’s rule is not characterized by the transgressions and instability present in his predecessors rule nor is it unsuccessful in establishing all three of the eternity-values. Henry V whole-heartedly welcomes divinity into his vision of the kingship because he wisely realizes the protection that divinity affords the monarchy. He finds that, in order to sustain a secure kingship, it is imperative that the king “be regarded as sacred and inviolable” (Bodin 125). The security that the kingship gains from divinity is one of the reasons Henry V goes to great lengths to cement to value of grace in his kingdom. Additionally, both Richard and Henry IV failed to promote either law or justice, whereas Henry V, through his dogged pursuit of the unification of France and England as well as his strict adherence to England’s laws, succeeded in adhering these values to the values of the kingdom. Even more impressive is the fact that Henry V did not sacrifice the physical might of the kingship in attaining these goals. If one questions the strength of his army, one need only to look at the remarkable victory that was achieved at Agincourt (5, IV.viii.72-104). Henry V’s kingship is an amalgamation of two very divergent theories of kingship: one being the divine right of kings and the other of ruling through brute strength. Shakespeare’s depiction of Henry V’s reign is most succinctly described as the “paradoxical reconciliation of Christian ethics with Machiavellian statesmanship. [Shakespeare] understands that the duty of kingship is to mirror as nearly as possible divine virtue, but he also understands

Professor McCracken

Politics 353

that this duty must be fulfilled within the limitations of the fallen world” (Baines 36). Simply put, the world is perfect, and therefore, rebellions and scandal are bound to be present, but it is the purpose of the king to be God-like in his ability to remedy the ailments of his kingdom.

Henry V not only cures his country’s ills, but his idealization of the kingship also, in a sense, vaccinates them from any further harm resembling the insurrections faced by both Richard and Henry IV.

Professor McCracken

Politics 353

Works Cited

Baines, B. J. (1980). Kingship of the Silent King: A study of Shakespeare's Bolingbroke. *English Studies*. 61(1), 24-36. Retrieved 14 December, 2008 from EBSCOhost Academic Search Premier.

Bodin, J. (2007). *On Sovereignty* (Ed. J. H. Franklin). Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Kantorowicz, E. (1957). *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*. Princeton: Princeton University Press

Shakespeare, W. (1996). *Richard II* (Eds. B. A. Mowstat & P. Werstine). New York: Washington Square Press.

Shakespeare, W. (2004). *Henry V*. New York: Spark Publishing.

Shakespeare, W. (2005). *Henry IV Parts One and Two*. New York: Spark Publishing.