



Kingship in Shakespeare

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Question: Ideal Kingship?



- How does Shakespeare present the problem of Kingship and Ideal Kingship in his plays?
- England was anxious about Monarchy due to:
 - Rule of a Female Monarch—Elizabeth I
 - Religious and Civil Conflict under Henry VIII and Mary
 - War of the Roses in 15th century
- Fear of Civil War
- Fear of Tyranny

An Ideal King Should:

- Be Male
- Be a Warrior—brave and courageous
- Care about the troops
- Be a courteous Knight and Gentleman—chivalrous to ladies
- Be a Man of the People
- Be Genuinely Religious—but not too much
- NOT be a Murderous Tyrant
- Have a clear and undisputed claim to the throne
- Unify rather than Divide the Country

Problem of Legitimacy

- Kingship in England was hereditary
- Need for male heir
- Henry VIII and his 8 wives
- He had a son who died after five years on throne
- Mary I ruled for five bloody years
- Elizabeth was technically illegitimate—daughter of Anne Boleyn



Machiavelli's The Prince and concepts of Power and Sovereignty

- Fox and Lion: A prince, therefore, being compelled knowingly to adopt the beast, ought to choose the fox and the lion; because the lion cannot defend himself against snares and the fox cannot defend himself against wolves. Therefore, it is necessary to be a fox to discover the snares and a lion to terrify the wolves. Those who rely simply on the lion do not understand what they are about. Therefore a wise lord cannot, nor ought he to, keep faith when such observance may be turned against him, and when the reasons that caused him to pledge it exist no longer. If men were entirely good this precept would not hold, but because they are bad, and will not keep faith with you, you too are not bound to observe it with them. Nor will there ever be wanting to a prince legitimate reasons to excuse this nonobservance.

Appearances Matter More than Reality

- Therefore it is unnecessary for a prince to have all the good qualities I have enumerated, but it is very **necessary to appear** to have them. And I shall dare to say this also, that to have them and always to observe them is injurious, and that to appear to have them is useful; to appear merciful, faithful, humane, religious, upright, and to be so, but with a mind so framed that should you require not to be so, you may be able and know how to change to the opposite.

- And you have to understand this, that a prince, especially a new one, cannot observe all those things for which men are esteemed, being often forced, in order to maintain the state, to act contrary to faith, friendship, humanity, and religion. Therefore it is necessary for him to have a mind ready to turn itself accordingly as the winds and variations of fortune force it, yet, as I have said above, not to diverge from the good if he can avoid doing so, but, if compelled, then to know how to set about it.
- For this reason a prince ought to take care that he never lets anything slip from his lips that is not replete with the above-named five qualities, that he may appear to him who sees and hears him altogether merciful, faithful, humane, upright, and religious.

Machiavelli and Shakespeare

- Thesis: Shakespeare's presentation of Kings from Civil War era of 14th and 15th century reflect a Machiavellian view: Both Lion and Fox; master of managing public perception and appearances; Pious but pragmatic; nationalistic and strong in as a war leader; Charismatic with the "common touch"
- Thesis: Henry V stands between two examples who represent other extremes of bad leadership: Richard II, a weak and non-pragmatic king, and Richard III, a strong and militant king, willing to do what is necessary, possessed of both traits of Fox and Lion, but too much a Beast—so lacking in humanity that he fails to win over the People and commits so many crimes against Nobles that he loses control.

Richard II Fails as Lion AND Fox

- As a Lion, he failed to put down rebellion in Ireland and relied on others to fight his wars
- He was more a courtier than a warrior
- As a fox, he lacked political cleverness—lost support of the Commons with taxes and of Nobles by usurping Bolingbroke's estates
- He should have either disposed of Bolingbroke or he should have found a way to win him over with favors. Instead he exiled him, stole his ancestral lands, and then failed to recognize his threat and assemble an army to repel him.



Richard III: The Beast

- He was an usurping tyrant
- Had his nephews murdered
- Executed close advisors with weak legal justification
- He PROBABLY poisoned his wife
- Thought to be a courageous and good soldier



Richard III: Too Wicked

- How does he compare to Machiavelli's Prince?
- He uses cleverness—the Fox—to knock off his rivals
- He uses religion to appear Pious—while not being so
- But, he doesn't keep the loyalty of his friends—and betrays them
- He is a good fighter but he allows Richmond to pick the time and place of battle of Bosworth
- He is too wicked and loses the love of both the People and his Army

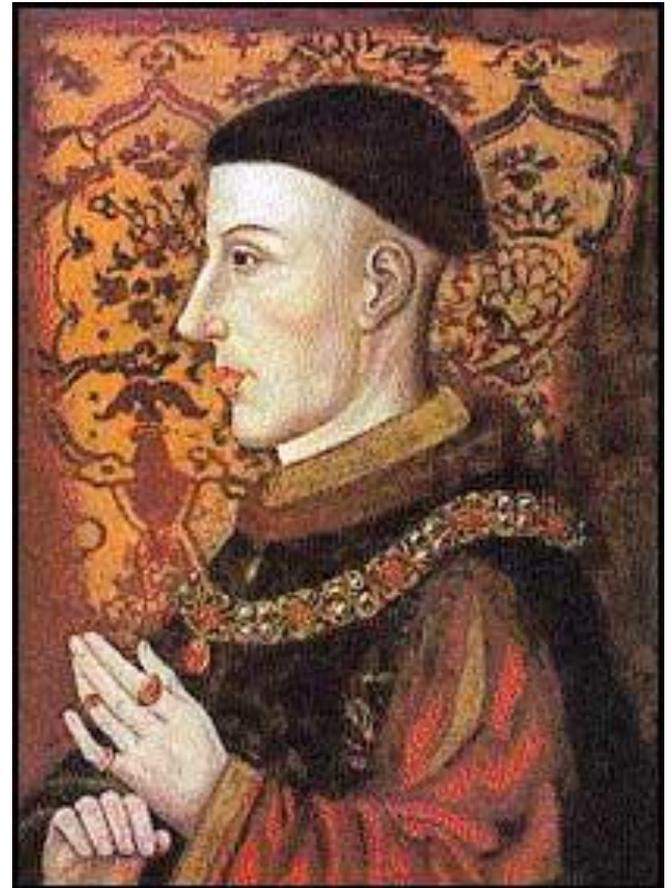
- Defeats Richard III in Battle of Bosworth
- August 22, 1485
- Ended War of Roses
- Established Tudor Dynasty
- Richmond becomes King Henry VII
- Grandfather of Elizabeth I

Henry VII (Richmond)



- “Hal” in Henry IV
- Henry IV inherits throne with a cloud of uncertainty
- Hal as a “regular” man
- Falstaff and the boys in Boar’s Head Tavern
- Later he earns glory on battlefield
- Shows respect for his Father
- Courts like a gentleman
- Wins Battle of Agincourt (Henry V)

The Ideal King: Henry V



Hal is Pretending to Gain Popularity

- Appearances and Reality: Hal says in I.2.200ff: “I will imitate the sun, who doth permit the base contagious clouds to smother up his beauty from the world, that, when he please again **to be himself**, being wanted, he may be more wondered at by breaking through the foul and ugly mists of vapors that did strangle him.”
- Hal and Hotspur (Henry Percy)

Redemption in Battle

- Redemption has Biblical connotation: Story of Prodigal Son; Jesus as Redeemer for our sins
- III.2.137: Hal's speech where he declares his true self to his father: "I will redeem all this on Percy's head, and, in the closing of some glorious day, when I will wear a garment all of blood and stain my favors in a bloody mask, which washed away, shall scour my shame with it..."

Hotspur Killed by Hal

- Hal is gracious in victory
- “Fare thee well, great heart. Ill-weaved ambition, how much art thou shrunk! When that this body did contain a spirit, A kingdom for it was too small a bound, But now two paces of the vilest earth is room enough. This earth that bears thee dead bears not alive so stout a gentleman. If thou wert sensible of courtesy, I should not make so dear a show of zeal. But let my favors hide thy mangled face; (he covers Hotspur's face)”

King Henry V as a Man like Others

- King Henry in disguise To Soldier (Bates):
- “I think the King is but a man as I am: the violet smells to him as it doth to me; the element shows to him as it doth to me; all his senses have but human conditions: his ceremonies laid by, in his nakedness he appears but a man; and though his affections are higher mounted than ours, yet, when they stoop, they stoop with the like wing. Therefore when he sees reason of fears, as we do, his fears, out of doubt, be of the same relish as ours are: yet, in reason, no man should possess him with any appearance of fear, let he, by showing it, should dishearten his army.”

Henry V Honorable and Pious

- After battle of Agincourt where French knights are decimated:
- “And be it death proclaimed through our host to boast of this, or take that praise from God which is his only.”
- Fluellen: “Is not lawful, an please your majesty, to tell how many is killed?”
- Henry: “Yes, captain; but with this acknowledgement, That God fought for us.”

Kingship in Shakespeare

- Richard II: Too weak and foolish—neither Fox nor Lion
- Henry IV: Both Fox and Lion, but had to depose rightful king so lacks legitimacy
- Henry V as Ideal—a man of the people—yet noble—sensitive to the moral challenges of kingship—willing to die with men in battle—not vainglorious or boastful
- Richard III as the Tyrant: Seized power through political means with false pretense of Religion; No morals—killed family to gain and keep power
- The Tudor Dynasty Justified
- Elizabeth's reign validated