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The "True King's Queen": Unlocking the Performance Potential of the Queen in Shakespeare's *Richard II*

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ABSTRACT

Reviewing the Old Vic's 1947 production of *Richard II*, W. A. Darlington commented "Margaret Leighton does what can be done with a Queen to whom Shakespeare gives no name and history no place": an opinion endorsed by many reviewers across the twentieth century. More recently, however, theatre critics have identified hitherto unseen qualities in *Richard II*'s Queen, suggesting the need to reappraise her theatrical potential and recover her vitality and significance on the modern stage. Examining a selection of moments from contemporary performance, I present a gallery of contrasting faces that show the Queen is a prismatic figure of affective, political, and spiritual dimensions. By focusing on the contradictions that the Queen displays as she navigates the tensions inherent in balancing desires for personal fulfilment in affective relationships with social and political responsibilities and the need to survive in a volatile and male-dominated world, I avoid constructing her according to traditional gender binaries. I suggest that these contradictions render *Richard II*'s Queen meaningful for our contemporary moment which acknowledges ambiguities in the construction of identities and recognises the constructive possibilities of shifting between positions as a means of processing and judging complex issues.

KEYWORDS

Shakespeare; Richard II; Queen; performance; history plays

Richard II's Queen(s) Between History and Drama

Reviewing Ralph Richardson's 1947 production of *Richard II* at the Old Vic, W. A. Darlington stated "Margaret Leighton does what can be done with a Queen to whom Shakespeare gives no name and history no place". The implication of Darlington's comment is that not much can be done with this dramatic figure; indeed, an examination of the play's stage history from 1815 to the present day reveals that, until very recently, the Queen has been poorly viewed by theatre critics, who sometimes fail to mention her at all.

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Some reviewers in the first half of the twentieth century echo Darlington's view of the Queen as nondescript: a recurring adjective being "colourless" (*Daily Telegraph* of Nancy Hornsby, Henry Cass, 1934; *Daily Mail* of Peggy Ashcroft, John Gielgud, 1937; *Times* of Joy Parker, John Gielgud, 1952). The Queen did not fare much better in later twentieth-century and early twenty-first-century productions, with some critics focusing on the actress's physical appearance and others giving only a passing comment, thereby reinforcing the old view of her as unremarkable. Charles Spencer merely stated that Catherine Walker was "a touchingly isolated drop-dead gorgeous glamorous Queen" (Steven Pimlott, 2000); Rebecca Tyrell saw Genevieve O'Reilly's Queen (Trevor Nunn, 2005) as "a love-lorn young It-girl"; and Hannah Barrie's intriguing performance (Michael Boyd, 2007) was generally overlooked by reviewers. More recently, theatre critics have recognised qualities that counter this perceived blandness and Emma Hamilton (Gregory Doran, 2013), Pippa Bennett-Warner (Michael Grandage, 2011), and Anneika Rose (Simon Godwin, 2015) were seen, respectively, as "strong and sensitive", "ardent", and "fierce" (Patrick; Carpenter; Brennan). However, although Michael Billington, praised Leila Farzad's "exceptional fire and spirit" (Adjoa Andoh and Lynette Lynton, 2019), he, nevertheless, referred to the role as "Richard's normally anonymous queen".

Billington's designation of the Queen as "normally anonymous" suggests the pre-dominant critical view and also points to a textual problem. Neither the Folio nor Quarto texts refer to Richard's Queen by her forename, and Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin, echoing the perceptions of some twentieth-century reviewers, sum her up as "[n]ameless to the end and powerless to affect the historical action" (157). As the historical Richard II married twice, the Queen's namelessness may be rooted in his conjugal relations. When his first wife, Anne of Bohemia, died in 1394, Richard was so grief-stricken that "for a year he would not enter any chamber that she had been in" (Saul 456), and as "a grand gesture of mourning" ordered the palace at Sheen, the site of Anne's death, to be burned down (Rubin 113). Richard's Queen during the final few years of his reign was Isabel of Valois, who "was only six when she was handed over to Richard at Ardres" and nine when her husband was deposed (Saul 457).

History itself, then, offered Shakespeare the opportunity of creating a richly paradoxical character and, in the first instance, the omission of a name from the speech prefix unsettles straightforward identification as Anne or Isabel. For some, though, this has led to the assumption that the Queen is a composite: Andrew Gurr states simply that she is a "conflation" of both wives (65) and, reviewing a 1926 production at the Regent Theatre, the critic for the *Times* remarked that Shakespeare had put "a little of the first Queen into [. . . the second]" leaving her "a weak confusion". However, approaching the character with an awareness of these different marital relationships and their concomitant pressures and associations, allows a creative slippage in playing and viewing the Queen, since aspects of the lives of both Anne and Isabel can feed into actors'

interpretations, making her story one of deep durational love and the tragedy of an exiled orphan-widow. Further, it permits perceptions of her as the embodiment of the concept of queenship, adding the feminine perspective to a consideration of Richard's and Henry's kingships and providing a locus for the consideration of the "dilemma for women characters", as Irene Dash defines it, of relating and responding to questions of male power and responsibility (18).

Questioning the identity of the Queen's historical counterpart, though, also has important implications for textual interpretation, production, and reception. Although *Richard II* indicates the Queen's French origins on six occasions[1] and she is often listed as Isabel in production programmes, Howard and Rackin maintain that "Shakespeare transforms the child into a mature woman" (157); and (with a few exceptions), Richard's Queen has, over the last two centuries, been played by mature actors—suggesting a disjuncture between the role and Richard's second girl wife.[2] However, both Helen Ostovich and Deanne Williams argue that Shakespeare writes her as the child Isabel and perceive her age as crucial to her dramatic and theatrical significance. They stress the political and personal implications of Richard's second marriage, which cemented peace with France, allowed the king time to mourn Anne whilst forming "a tender private relationship without sexual demands" (Ostovich 22), and fulfilled his longing for a child (Williams 56).

Ostovich posits that this focus on the child-bride's "undisturbed virginity […] and the spiritually healing dimension of the marriage itself, personally and internationally" would have "inspired Shakespeare to think of Isabel in terms of the enclosed garden and its religious analogies" (23). This metaphor, made concrete by placing the Queen in a garden at the centre of the play, Ostovich argues, sets up inevitable associations with "spiritual values traditionally understood in *hortus conclusus*" (21, 24), and thus gives her "a power visually and verbally, that expands back and forth in the play into a kind of triptych – composed of 2.2, 3.4, and 5.1 [. . .] and aligns her generally with the cult of the Virgin Mary and the related cult of Elizabeth" (21). Evoking these resonances, comprehensible to Shakespeare's audiences through the continued influence of Marian iconography (24), would make the Queen a figure who "questions the political realities of the play by asserting a spiritual dimension of kingship" (21) and who "challenge[s] readings in which a harsh critique of Richard enables approval of Bolingbroke" (24).

In figuring Richard's Queen as Isabel, Williams also identifies a spiritual dimension, noting that, in 2.2, her Marian connections are expressed through her use of "the traditional language and iconography of the Annunciation, which highlights the Virgin Mary's youth" (65) and her reference to Richard as her "fair rose" (5.1.8) which, given "the popular association of the rose with the Virgin Mary extends the play's pattern of defining Isabelle against the Virgin". Williams critiques representations of the Queen as an "unhistorical

adult", arguing that she only came to be seen as a mature woman following the Victorian cult of girlhood, but actually exemplifies the potential of medieval girls to take on responsible royal roles (53, 61). She also suggests that imagining her as "a little girl, as a pawn in international politics, and as an undeserving victim of the play's political machinations, [. . . intensifies] our sympathy for her plight at a dramatic level" (61).

Ostovich and Williams, then, argue that identifying the Queen as Richard's child bride adds poignancy to her personal story and weight to her symbolic significance. They both present her as loving and fiercely loyal and—in line with the precocity of the historical Isabel described by Froissart—aware in the intellectual, political, and affective senses. In light of the vibrant, and spirited—as well as spiritual—and sympathetic Queen that Ostovich and Williams present, how did she come to be perceived on stage as so bland and ineffective? One reason would be the pre-dominant focus on the eponymous king, not only in critical discourse but also in theatrical productions, particularly those of the Victorian and Edwardian actor-managers whose portrayals stressed Richard's sad fate as the consummate poet but incapable king,[3] and presented the Queen as a figure of wifely devotion primarily instrumental in generating sympathy for Richard.[4]

Given that reviewers have recently glimpsed hitherto unrecognised qualities in *Richard II*'s Queen, it is an appropriate moment to reappraise her potential on the modern stage and recover this apparently minor character from previous perceptions of her as colourless. Analysing the Queen's textual scenes—2.1, 2.2, 3.4, and 5.1—and her inclusion in scenes other than these scripted appearances in a selection of contemporary productions, I present a gallery of contrasting faces that further nuance this dramatic figure for our historical moment when the dilemma is not just who should be King or Queen but whether or not these roles are still appropriate in a contemporary democracy.

I focus principally on six twenty-first-century productions: Steven Pimlott, 2000; Trevor Nunn, 2005; Michael Grandage, 2011; Gregory Doran, 2013, revived 2016; Simon Godwin, 2015; and Adjoa Andoh and Lynette Linton, 2019;[5] and reference significant examples from Ron Daniels, 1990; and Steven Berkoff, 1995, revived 2005.[6] As Elizabeth Schafer points out, "the setting, periodisation, costuming and theatre space, [. . . are] crucial to a production's impact" (208), and the productions selected offer an opportunity to consider the presentation of the Queen in medieval settings and temporal relocations. Responding to Linda Walsh Jenkins' contention that interpreting women's roles requires a consideration of "the visual image/icon on stage as it is shaped by director/performer/designer" (239), I take account of actors' views and look at how the medieval and postmodern iconographies that feature in the scenographies of my selected productions inform perceptions of the Queen.

By drawing together a selection of theatrical moments that reveal the contradictions in the character within and across the productions I discuss, I show

that the Queen is a conflicted and ambiguous figure who can produce an equally ambivalent response in audiences. I regard these instances from performance as gestic moments since, to varying degrees, they embody the Brechtian principles of *Verfremdungseffekt* and the "not, but", by functioning to defamiliarize the Queen, encouraging audiences to look afresh at the role; point to key ideological issues within the world of the play and/or the time of the production; and suggest that other courses of action may have been possible.[7] Focusing on the contradictions that the Queen displays as she navigates the tensions inherent in balancing desires for personal fulfilment in affective relationships with social and political responsibilities and the need to survive in a volatile and male-dominated world avoids constructing her according to typical gender binaries that oppose female and male qualities, such as weak or powerful, emotional or rational, active or passive. Presenting the Queen's ambiguities also confirms her relevance to our contemporary moment in which "complexity, multiplicity, and contradiction" are a means of enriching female identities (Bailey 26) and the flexibility to shift between different positions and tactics is necessary to respond to complex issues (Lotz 6; also qt. in Renegar and Sowards 10).

Enter the Queen

Textually, Richard's Queen is not seen until 2.1 when she accompanies Richard to visit the dying Gaunt, and she appears subsequently in three scenes (2.2, 3.4, and 5.1). However, there is a long history of including her in 1.1, where the appellants challenge each other, and 1.3 where the tournament is aborted and Bolingbroke and Mowbray are banished. Including the Queen as a silent presence in 1.1 gives audiences the opportunity of seeing in action straight away the intense listening that is one of her core qualities. It can also underscore the Queen's status and signal her relationship with Richard. Appearing in 1.1 gave Pippa Bennett-Warner (Grandage, 2011) a sense of belonging at court and being "[her] husband's right-hand woman" (PI).[8]

Further, the Queen's presence in 1.1 can generate an awareness of her relations with other characters whose lives are linked with hers but to whom she never speaks, suggesting tensions between innocence and blame. In Gregory Doran's extra-textual prologue (2013, 2016), the characters' entrances were orchestrated to imply their various relationships as they gathered to form a funeral tableau around the figure of the Duchess of Gloucester (Jane Lapotaire), who was stage centre leaning across her late husband's coffin [Figure 1]. The Queen was given focus as she entered from upstage, curtsied to the coffin, and glanced at the bereaved Duchess. This fleeting interaction with Gloucester's widow foreshadowed the Queen's own experiences of grief [Figure 2] and prompted questions about the extent of her knowledge of Gloucester's murder. Being in 1.1 made Leigh Quinn (Doran, 2016) aware of

Figure 1 Emma Hamilton as the Queen and Jane Lapotaire as the Duchess of Gloucester, dir. Gregory Doran, 2013. Photo by Kwame Lestrade, © RSC.

Bolingbroke as an unsettling figure (PI) and on his declaration that Mowbray had plotted Gloucester's death (1.1.100), Quinn purposefully left the stage with her Ladies and the Duchess of York, signalling the growing gravity of the situation and the need for her to be protected. Including Richard's Queen in 1.1 and making her witness to the ferocious challenges issued by Bolingbroke and Mowbray presents her as a paradoxical figure of culpability and vulnerability.

These tensions were further explored by Boyd and Andoh and Linton who, in addition to having the Queen in 1.1 and 1.3, included her in 1.4, making her party to the discussion of Bolingbroke's departure and "courtship to the

Figure 2 Emma Hamilton as the Queen and Jane Lapotaire as the Duchess of Gloucester, dir. Gregory Doran, 2013. Photo by Kwame Lestrade, © RSC.

common people" (1.4.23), and the King's resolve to "farm our royal realm" (1.4.44) to go to war in Ireland. These productions deployed her silent presence to offer strikingly different pictures of the Queen as rejected and respected. In Boyd, when declaring to Aumerle "He [Bolingbroke] is our cousin, cousin" (1.4.19), Richard (Jonathan Slinger) walked upstage, passing Hannah Barrie's Queen, who was moving towards him as if to reassert her own kinship; Richard, though, stepped aside, avoiding contact with her, and picked up a drink from the tray held by a servant. Barrie swayed awkwardly as if trying to recover herself after this snub, then walked slowly after Richard attempting uncertainly to get close to him. She was visibly perturbed when, seconds later, he hurled away his wine goblet in anger at the thought of Bolingbroke behaving "As were our England in reversion his" (1.4.34). When the servant re-entered and gave Bushy a letter, Richard approached him to ask "what news?" (1.4.52), passing by the Queen once again, emphasising her alienation from the preceding discussion and the business in hand. Slinger played the scene, throughout which Barrie hovered disconcertedly, as if unaware or undesiring of her presence: an intention that was reinforced by his penultimate line "Come, gentlemen, let's all go visit him" (1.4.62), on which he led his favourites offstage, leaving Barrie to follow unacknowledged.

In contrast, Andoh and Linton had Richard (Adjoa Andoh) and the Queen (Leila Farzad) enter 1.4 dancing to lively music, the choreography implying their close relationship as sexual partners and their enjoyment of each other's prowess as dancers. Then, as moneybags were thrown around by the favourites, the royal couple settled at a table upstage. Richard sat before some scales and emptied coins into one side of the balance and the Queen put on glasses and sat before a ledger smoking: her cigarette suggesting someone at ease with defying the norms of acceptable feminine behaviour and her engagement with the accounts showing her as a business woman but also implicating her, as well as Richard, in Ross's criticism of the king: "The commons hath he pilled with grievous taxes, / And [. . .] the nobles hath he fined / For ancient quarrels" (2.1.247-249). These actions configured the monarchs as a decadent couple at the head of a profligate and carefree court, but unlike Barrie's marginalised Queen, Farzad was an equal partner in Richard's (mis)rule. When Green attempted to divert the King's attention away from Bolingbroke with "Well, he is gone" (1.4.36a), Farzad completed his line "And with him go these thoughts" (1.4.36b), confirming her involvement in the discussion. Their partnership was further underscored at the end of the scene by amending "Come, gentlemen" to "Come, gentle Queen" (1.4.62). Whilst Barrie's silent and unsuccessful attempts at proximity to Richard showed a woman thwarted in her desires to fulfil her royal and romantic role, Farzad's Queen was seen as united with the King personally and politically.

Being included in 1.1, 1.3, and 1.4 significantly changes the knowledge of Richard's injustices and murderous dealings that the Queen takes with her

into Ely house (2.1): a knowledge that might taint her "fair rose" (5.1.8) in her eyes, or taint her in the eyes of spectators. These interventions also intensify one of the Queen's fundamental predicaments: that of always being caught between what she knows and what she and others can say and to whom.

Medieval Mythologies, Materialist Politics, and Postmodern Iconography

In 2.1 the Queen speaks only one line: a greeting to Gaunt, but by the time the royal party exits she has witnessed the antagonistic and sometimes, in production, physically violent, altercation between Gaunt and Richard; York's complaint against the King's unjust treatment of kin and nation; and the seizure of Bolingbroke's inheritance. Her silence throughout does not undermine her significance since, as Graham Holderness recognises, "the female body is as elegant a theatrical sign as the presence secured through verbalisation" (170-171), and, as Ostovich contends, there is "plenty of time for [. . . the Queen] to signify distress at rudeness, attempts at appeasement, wifely support, resentment of the uncles' reproaches, [and] dismay at the outcome of the sickbed visit" (26). This is amply demonstrated in performance, as through gestures and proxemics actors create images that show the Queen pulled by the competing demands of love, loyalty, and regal responsibility whilst actively processing the wealth of information and emotions that suffuse this scene. Genevieve O'Reilly (Nunn, 2005) viewed 2.1 as a space of intense listening where the Queen perceives the beginning of a "political firestorm": an experience that "lights a fire within her" and fuels the sense of foreboding she expresses in 2.2 (PI).

The Queen's premonition that some "unborn sorrow ripe in fortune's womb, / Is coming towards me" (2.2.10-11) is fulfilled when Green enters with the news that "The banished Bolingbroke repeals himself, / And with uplifted arms is safe arrived / at Ravenspurgh" (2.2.49-51). The narrative developments of 2.2 subject the Queen to the pressure of balancing agitation with etiquette: a point stressed by Bennett-Warner (Grandage, 2011), who was consciousness of being "distraught" yet trying, whilst grappling with such deep inner turmoil, to maintain her dignified sense of "queenliness" (PI).

The Queen's perturbation and prophecies of distorted birth might generate sympathy, but her portrayal is nuanced in performance by the design elements that reflect a production's historical, religious, or political underpinnings. Considering 2.2 in Doran's and Godwin's productions, which were informed by medieval mythologies of monarchy and the sacramental nature of kingship, alongside Berkoff's Marxist Materialist approach and Nunn's vision of modern celebrity royalty unsettles ideas of the Queen as "a focus for pathetic sentiment" (Howard and Rackin 158), and offers contradictory portraits that indicate a range of affective responses to her.

Doran's projection of the white hart—the "beautiful, mysterious beast" that Richard chose "as his personal emblem" (Hughes 19)—onto the saturated blue backdrop against which the Queen entered alone at the beginning of 2.2 was particularly striking[9] [Figure 3]. In his *Stella alchemiae* (1384), dedicated to Richard II, John Doubleday symbolically identifies a "fugitive servant" or "fugitive stag" with "a king reigning over a hundred thousand nations" (quoted in Hughes 19). Richard's seven hundred Cheshire men, knights, esquires and archers, three hundred of whom were his personal bodyguard, all wore the white hart badge. It became a powerful symbol of royal "alchemical regeneration" and intimidation of enemies to Richard's Christ-like kingship, represented in the hart being chained to the golden crown (Hughes 21). Presenting the Queen as a troubled and momentarily solitary figure overshadowed by and—through the mirror image on the stage floor—enveloped in the enlarged picture of his badge showed how her marriage to Richard

Figure 3 Emma Hamilton as the Queen, dir. Gregory Doran, 2013. Photo by Kwame Lestrade, © RSC.

immersed her in the mythological as well as political machinations of his kingship and his pretensions to be the indomitable guardian of a pure vision of monarchy. Juxtaposing this contemplative Queen with the symbolic force of the white hart revealed her as a woman whose life is inextricably bound up with Richard both as a man and a political-theological figure of kingship, therefore also evoking the vexed Christological concept of the king's two bodies. Associating the tremors of the Queen's "inward soul" and the heavy sadness that makes her "faint and shrink" (2.2.11-12, 30-32) with the precarious duality of the King's natural body and the body politic adds weight to her fears. Her concerns, then, foreshadow the moment when, in Richard's deposition, "[t]he fiction of the oneness of the double body breaks apart" (Kantorowicz 31), a fracture that supposes not only personal upheaval but civil war.

Godwin also deployed the image of the white hart, displaying banners and a shield bearing the emblem. The production emphasised the play's religious themes and reviewers noted the influence of *The Wilton Diptych* on Paul Wills' scenography in the "deep blues and glistering gold" and "sumptuous medieval costuming" (Day-Brosnan; Brown).[10] The centrality of the sacred aspects of kingship was reflected in Wills' modifications to the Globe's theatrical architecture through a cruciform build-out into the yard. Moreover, the sanctity of the king's contract with his people was stressed through Godwin's extra-textual prologue entitled *A ten year old* KING RICHARD *is coronated at Westminster Abbey by the Archbishop of Canterbury*, in which the boy Richard was crowned and vowed to "preserve unto God and the Holy Church entire peace and concord" and to "cause justice to be rendered rightly, impartially, and wisely in compassion and in truth" (Prompt Book).[11]

In keeping with this aesthetic, at the opening of 2.2, Anneika Rose knelt in prayer, evoking Richard's first wife Anne who is "thought to have fostered in England the cult of St Anne" (Saul 308), and is described in her tomb inscription as "Devoted to Christ" (Dussen 235) [Figure 4]. Glimpsing the Queen at prayer contextualized her fears and presented her as a person with a spiritual consciousness, suggesting she had been grappling before God with the premonitions she later voices. However, when Bushy knelt and desperately urged her not to despair, Rose's response shocked in its deconstruction of the religious figure of the scene's opening as she supported the firmness of "I will despair and be at enmity / With cozening hope" (2.2.68-69) by striking Bushy across the head. Rose switched from imaging a devout woman soliciting God and seeking peace in her troubled thoughts to angrily pouring out her revelations about flattery and false hope, thus presenting in this one scene two potentially incongruous faces: royal intercessor and assertive (or feisty, rude, aggressive) female.

In sharp contrast to Doran and Godwin, Steven Berkoff focused not on the spiritual but on what he perceived as *Richard II*'s potential to transmit to contemporary audiences "the dangers of imperialism, colonialism and

Figure 4 Anneika Rose as the Queen, dir. Simon Godwin, 2015. © Johan Persson / ArenaPAL.

nationalism"; he saw Richard as "part of the Oxbridge/Harrow/Ascot set who believed in this wonderful land, 'this scepter'd isle'" (programme note 2005 7). He relocated the play from its medieval context to the Victorian period and presented the Queen (Elaina Erika Davis, 1995; Julia Tarnoky, 2005) in 2.2 as a pampered young woman having her hair brushed by a Lady in Waiting. His setting accommodated stylish dress and duels of honour whilst also offering an appropriate context for a consideration of the wealth and class structures associated with modern monarchies, and he "reinforce [d] the servant theme of Victorian England" by creating "a beautiful image of a spoilt and pretty young Queen having her hair lovingly caressed while she attends to other matters" (Berkoff 70). The "ample amount of cheap labour available" to the court was further underscored as servants were on hand to receive and return the top hats, gloves, and umbrellas, of the nobles, and to bring in a tray of tea (Berkoff 53). Berkoff's Marxist production presented

the Queen as cossetted and unaware of the extent of the national problem and the popular discontent at its root.

Deploying the Queen, as Berkoff did, to stress the enjoyment of luxury and privilege in the presence of those who are denied such securities does not offer a sympathetic portrait of the character and, in 1990, Ron Daniels' setting had similarly highlighted the ambivalent affective response the Queen might engender. The programme included a double-page spread of biographical details of modern dictators and audiences would have been able to make connections between the production's scenography and the Central and Eastern European revolutions of 1989. The suggested parallels between the medieval king and twentieth-century despots were expressed through Anthony McDonald's design which "imagine[d] England as a vast bleak warehouse where people could be rounded up and shot" and gave "the court décor [. . .] the eerie monumentality one associates with totalitarian tastes" (Taylor). This approach equated the Queen with any number of tyrants' wives, opening her up to the same criticisms as might be levelled at Michèle Duvalier, Imelda Marcos, or Elena Ceauşescu, who were among the spouses of the overthrown rulers mentioned in the programme.

The tensions between warmth and antipathy that the Queen might inspire are further illuminated by examining Trevor Nunn's relocation to a markedly contemporary England which offers a portrait of the Queen as chic, celebrity royal. The production drew parallels between "the Queen's fractious relationship with Richard" and the marriage of Prince Charles and Diana, Princess of Wales, "our modern icon of a forlorn princess" (O'Reilly, Nunn, 2005, PI). Nunn's extensive cutting produced a conflation of 1.1 and 1.3, which was set in a wooden-panelled room where Bolingbroke (Ben Miles) and Mowbray (Sean Baker) rehearsed their mutual accusations of treason, "leap[ing] up from their opposing benches to argue, dispatch-box style" (Bassett). This fusion excised the Duchess of Gloucester and the first female intervention was in "a bass-heavy nightclub" (*Sunday Times Culture*) with "leather sofas, [and] glass tables for lining up the coke", where Richard (Kevin Spacey) was seen "in his shirtsleeves like a city type chilling out after work" (Tyrrell). This setting constructed Richard as a playboy-king and showed him and his favourites in the company of anonymous women who were, as O'Reilly unequivocally put it, "whores" (PI). Seeing Spacey's Richard in the contrasting places of his work and leisure emphasised O'Reilly's exclusion from the King's state business and private pleasure, stressed his mobility in contrast to hers, and suggested the frequency with which she was abandoned, whilst also figuring her as a woman betrayed by both her husband and those who rebelled against him.

In 2.2, O'Reilly's Queen was seen at a photo shoot, the white screen backdrop setting off her bright pink Armani dress and confirming her use to Richard as "a photo opportunity" (O'Reilly PI). Staging the Queen as an object of the

camera's eye also suggested her relations with the extra-perceptual world of this production in a way significantly different to the camera's mediation of the images of the masculine characters. Gaunt's "This England" speech and Bolingbroke's farewell to England were recorded by video cameras so, in contrast to the men, whose stirring speeches were broadcast on giant screens either side of the proscenium arch, the Queen would be reduced to her two-dimensional "submissively posed" (O'Reilly PI) silent portrait [Figure 5]. For O'Reilly, Nunn's photoshoot represented the Queen as "that image of the people's princess or the magazine model that is modern royalty" with nothing to do "but look good in pictures" (PI).[12]

By evoking parallels with Diana, Nunn introduced the idea of the Queen's public image, thus adding to the contradictions O'Reilly's interpretation embodied. Figuring the Queen as a reflection of Princess Diana—described by Christopher Hauke as "the epitome of a postmodern cultural icon enshrined and known only through her photographic image" (68)—suggests Richard's

Figure 5 Genevieve O'Reilly as the Queen, dir. Trevor Nunn, 2005. © Manuel Harlen / ArenaPAL.

Queen as a locus for a range of emotions, expectations, and aspirations of modern women. Hauke argues that people's felt knowledge of Diana "was never any real 'knowing' but rather the experience of another simulacrum", an image behind which no original or real person existed (69); this would leave Nunn's Queen as a shallow figure of contemporary mediatisation. But considering how 1990s press and television culture "made Princess Diana an icon of female suffering and survival [. . .] who bridged the gap between her own 'Royal' and dysfunctional marriage" and the condition of her female contemporaries (Becker 28), makes Nunn's Queen a figure of sympathy, especially as O'Reilly saw her love for Richard as "unrequited" (PI).

Images in the public domain, though, can be the result of deliberate self-fashioning and Françoise Gaillard argues that Diana "work[ed] to turn herself into an icon throughout her life as a celebrity" and notes that images from news archives disseminated after her death comprised "something very much like a supermodel's press book" (165). The Princess Diana connections activated in Nunn's production suggest a sort of agency possible within this high-tech representation of the play-world by showing a Queen capable of creating her own archive to ensure an appropriate representation of herself.

Setting O'Reilly's Diana-styled Queen in a photoshoot complemented Bushy's talk of perspectives as Princess Diana comprised a "multiplicity of images" that generated the "different (and very specific) fan clubs" and critics that formed around her (Kramer 488). It made her tirade against "cozening hope" as a "flatterer / [. . .] parasite [. . . and] keeper back of death" (2.2.69-70) jarringly off-message, belying the demure demeanour which was being replicated for the public gaze, and suggesting the more transgressive qualities of the twentieth-century "Queen of hearts" O'Reilly reflected.[13]

In Nunn's contemporary setting, the Diana parallels are enriching as the "dream and misfortune both" that she offered (Gaillard 163) are states the Queen knows well: she is urged by Richard in her misfortune "To think our former state a happy dream" (5.1.18). Diana also figured as an appealing icon of the ordinary modern woman, who did not conceal the emotional aspects —joyous and painful—of her role as princess, wife, and mother, in spite of traditional images of dutiful and reserved British royals. However, since Nunn felt that the relevance of *Richard II* to his contemporary moment lay in the challenging of "everything about our institutions [. . . and] the issue of the monarchy and the republican debate" (programme n.pag.) his associations with Diana, who actively promoted her identification with the common people whilst maintaining her privilege, sets up a clash that defamilairizes the role and urges questions about her own worth as well as that of the monarchy in general. Acknowledging the parallels between Princess Diana and Nunn's Armani-clad Queen triggers complicated perceptions of Richard's wife as innocent victim, shrewd manipulator, and rebel. This interpretation also offered a designer version of the modern royal woman, clothed in haute couture and

ultimately alienated from the realities of the lives of so many of her subjects who might peruse her photos in glossy magazines.[14]

The tensions between Richard's Queen as ordinary woman and privileged figure were also expressed in Andoh and Linton. Her inclusion in extra-textual scenes (1.1, 1.3, 1.4) intensified Farzad's felt lack of Richard in 2.2 and 3.4 and signalled the false division between the personal and political, as their relationship as husband and wife was portrayed as inseparable from their relationship as King and Queen. The fusion of the personal and political was made explicit in the garden as Farzad's tone combined a sense of command that affirmed her status with a frustration at the disturbance caused by Richard's absence. The garden was configured as a space of feminine intimacy as the discussion of activities to "drive away the heavy thought of care" (3.4.2) was punctuated by her Lady (Nicholle Cherrie) sugar-waxing the Queen's underarms. This action, suggested in rehearsal by Farzad, reflected Andoh's aim for audiences "to see the universal in the particular" by showing the Queen as subject to the trans-historical and cross-cultural bodily pressures of all women (Andoh PI). Presenting the Queen as concerned with the socially-acceptable norms of beauty and appearance stressed her feminine humanity, reflecting Shakespeare's constant concern with the humanity of kings. In needing to perform the same banal bodily rituals as the greatest and least of her female subjects, Farzad's Queen was (to borrow Cleopatra's words), "No more but e'en a woman and / Commanded by such poor passions as the maid that milks / And does the meanest chores" (4.16.75-77). Here, gender makes no distinction; like Richard, she would "live with bread [. . .] feel want, / Taste grief, need friends" (3.2.171-172).

True Love's Tears and Passion's Protestations

When, after hearing of Richard's downfall, the Queen exits the garden, she goes to meet him in a London street. The meeting between Richard and the Queen in 5.1 has moved reviewers, but impressions of her as "a remarkable instance of feminine devotion" (*Times* 16 March 1857 of Ellen Kean, Charles Kean, 1957) and "all melting tenderness and compassion" (Westell of Barbara Stannard, Anthony Quale, 1951) [Figure 6], have supported views of her as "the mystical warrant for Richard's legitimacy" (Howard and Rackin 157) and a means of heightening his romantic and tragic status (Hodgdon 130-132). It is important to recognise, though, that by the end of this scene, the Queen, as well as Richard, is "Doubly divorced" (5.1.71). Richard accuses Northumberland "you violate / A two-fold marriage – 'twixt my crown and me / And then betwixt me and my married wife" (5.1.71-73), and the Queen is undergoing the same process of severance from her title and her spouse.

The road between Westminster and the Tower is the last site of her downward trajectory from court, to garden, to street, and parallels Richard's descent. This was theatrically realised in Grandage (2011) in a way that

Figure 6 Heather Stannard as the Queen, dir. Anthony Quale, 1951. Photo by Angus McBean, © RSC.

illuminates the fertile interactions between histories and imagination possible through the Queen's namelessness and suggests connections with women in other Shakespeare plays that further enrich the character. Bennett-Warner delivered her first speech from the upstage gallery that had served as the battlements of Flint Castle, from which Richard (Eddie Redmayne) came "down" to the "base court" (3.3.179-181), setting up visual connections with her husband's fall as she came down to be with him [Figure 7]. This spatial echo created for Bennett-Warner a conscious link with *Romeo and Juliet* by staging a reversal of the "balcony scene" (PI).

The connections with the headstrong teenager lie not just in the tender language of their parting, which mirrors the meeting of Romeo and Juliet, but in the Queen's "fierce intellect" (O'Reilly, Nunn, 2005, PI). Indeed, Quinn (Doran, 2016) saw the Queen as having "the same brain speed, desire, and passion" as Juliet (PI) combined with childlike sincerity; drawing on her knowledge of Isabel, she imagined her encouraging words "The lion dying thrusteth forth his paw / And wounds the earth, if nothing else, with rage / To be o'erpowered" (5.1.29-31) as perhaps something Richard had said to her "like a bedtime story" (PI), suggesting the father-daughter relationship

Figure 7 Pippa Bennett-Warner as the Queen, dir. Michael Grandage, 2011. © Johan Persson / ArenaPAL.

that pertained to Richard and Isabel's unconsummated marriage, whilst also making these lines a guileless justification of self-defence.

Bennett-Warner's knowledge of Richard II's two wives and the links she made between the Queen and Juliet allowed her to play a range of youthful and mature qualities, and her approach was also nuanced by characteristics she saw in other Shakespeare women that challenge perceptions of her as "a pathetic melancholy spectator at her husband's downfall" (Holderness 172). Apart from associating her determination to meet Richard in the street with Juliet's defiance of her parents, Bennett-Warner felt an affinity with *King Lear*'s Cordelia in the Queen's frank tenacity, and with Lady Macbeth, in her exhortation to Richard to act in both a virile and kingly way: to "man up" (PI). Bennett-Warner's frustration at Richard's inaction was, then, imbued with the love of the ingenuous, yet shrewd, Juliet and the keen desire of Lady Macbeth for the triumph of masculine resolve over doubt and dispossession.

Drawing on her knowledge that the historical Richard and Isabel had been "thrown into" positions of power as children, Andoh saw the King and Queen as needing to be "each other's carers" and maintain constant communication about "project run-the-country" (PI). She and Linton foregrounded this closeness in 5.1: there was the suggestion of mutual blessing in Richard placing his hand on the Queen's head and taking her hand to his head; a merging of parental and marital tenderness as, when commissioning her to tell his story, Richard sat behind the Queen cradling and rocking her; and respect in their final farewell as Andoh crouched down and touched Farzad's foot, paying her tribute with the gesture used throughout the production to express esteem. Richard and the Queen were presented as equals, reciprocally bound together in love, dependence, and responsibility for state affairs, suggesting the need to judge the Queen as much as Richard in relation to their accountability whilst not mitigating a sympathetic response towards the personal affective loss that is the price of their downfall.

Gesturing Beyond Exile

In 5.1, Richard urges his Queen "Hie thee to France, / And cloister thee in some religious house" (5.1.22-23) and her geographical destiny is enforced by Bolingbroke's command that "With all swift speed [she] must away to France" (5.1.54). While the discovery of Aumerle's treasonous plot, the Duchess of York's appeal for Henry to pardon her son, Richard's murder, and its reception by the new king play out, the Queen can be forgotten. However, in Pimlott, Catherine Walker made a brief but compelling intervention in the concluding scene, reinforcing the importance of her role in and beyond this tragedy. The production's minimalist white-box stage environment, which generated a permeable space, facilitated Walker's co-presence in other scenes the Queen is not scripted into and presented her not simply as an observer of a conflict between two cousins but bound up with them in the struggle.

Pimlott's production began with Richard speaking an interpolated prologue comprising a composite extract from his prison speech, the first five lines of which were also spoken by the Queen as she sat alone at the beginning of the garden scene and by Henry IV when he was left alone on stage at the end of the play:

> I have been studying how I may compare
> This prison where I live unto the world,
> And for because the world is populous
> And here is not a creature but myself
> I cannot do it. Yet I'll hammer it out (5.5.1-5).

The sharing of these lines united the Queen with both the play's kings, creating a bond between all three in their resolve to "hammer [. . .] out" their respective

roles within a power structure that enforces isolation whilst also requiring collective discourse.

The tensions between the unity and separation of these three figures were further developed after Richard's return from Ireland. In an action that Pimlott introduced as a prologue to Richard's capitulation at Flint Castle, the Queen sat huddled upstage, Richard and Bolingbroke came to stand facing each other, and Bolingbroke spoke the lines that Richard later speaks to the Queen:

> In winter's tedious nights sit by the fire
> With good old folks, and let them tell thee tales
> Of woeful ages long ago betid;
> And ere thou bid goodnight, to quite their griefs
> Tell thou the lamentable tale of me (5.1.40-44).

These dislocated words and the co-presence of these characters—separated from each other at this point in the play—emphasised the simultaneity of their unfolding stories and suggested a mutual recognition of the shared tragedy of the hollow crown.

Walker continued as a silent co-presence throughout 3.3 and this strange encounter, in which Henry identified with Richard's "lamentable tale", was echoed in a similarly uncanny (mis)encounter between Bolingbroke and the Queen. When Bolingbroke requested reparation for the wrongs done him by Richard, the Queen looked up from her lonely upstage position and Bolingbroke turned downstage so that they exchanged a fleeting glance. In this interstitial space between the anticipation and the materialisation of Richard on the battlements, Bolingbroke and the Queen faced each other in a transient site of potential acknowledgement, where, although geographically distanced, their common concerns were evanescently present to each other. After Richard and the lords exited at the end of 3.3, the Queen spoke the first five lines of the prison soliloquy, affirming her own sense of constraint, separation, and mental struggle. Having Walker as a co-presence at Flint Castle urged a consideration of the connections between the Queen, Richard, and Bolingbroke, and created an awareness of the reciprocal impacts of their lives.

Pimlott's treatment of the Queen allows the construction of a more complex tripartite dynamic which unsettles the usual Richard-Bolingbroke binary, opening up a more gender-balanced way of interrogating the play's power relations and affective propensities: a perspective that was further reinforced by the intervention that Walker made in 5.6 just before Exton presented Richard's dead body to Henry. In 5.5, Richard was unceremoniously shot and bundled into a rough wooden box, referred to in the Prompt Book as the "coffin".[15] After the murder (in an echo of the production's opening), the space was animated by a peal of bells and a surge of activity as characters filled the stage, with no demonstrable awareness of Richard lying centre stage in his open coffin. The Queen entered upstage centre and Northumberland,

Ross, and Willoughby then spoke of sending to London the heads of the rebels —her husband's allies—and Hotspur announced the Abbot of Westminster's death, and delivered the Bishop of Carlisle to Henry's "kingly doom and sentence" (5.6.23). As these exchanges were taking place, the Queen, unheeded and clearly invisible to the assembled men, came to Richard's coffin, and laid a rose on his chest, creating a microsite of tenderness and personal emotion, around which this talk of executions, justice, and mercy, continued to flow.

As she is exiled by 5.6, the Queen's presence was paradoxical, and made the play's familiar resolution strange. Her interaction with Richard's corpse reminded spectators that men who are bad rulers form emotional bonds and was also an act of resistance against her own erasure from this history. Furthermore, as her silent gesture was antithetical to the spoken text, the Queen here became a figure through whom the production articulated one of the most important questions within and beyond the social world of the play. Juxtaposing her gentle act of affection and commemoration with the new King's dispensation of justice created a transient space of radical openness, giving pause to ask whether, between the power and the fear, the love and the violence, the throne and the grave, there might have been another way.

Conclusion

Much, then, can be done in performance with *Richard II*'s Queen. Thinking creatively with the stories of the historical Richard's two wives enriches perceptions of the Queen, nuancing the role with qualities across different stages of life and generating links with other Shakespeare women. Moreover, looking for the contradictions confirms that she is neither "colourless" nor, in her namelessness, "a weak confusion" or simple conflation of both Anne and Isabel. It also urges audiences to shift the position from which they view the Queen as she responds to the contingencies of the complicated narrative of regime change; as different sets of paradoxes are portrayed, new ways of thinking about the specificities of her situation open up. The production moments I have discussed reveal a multifaceted character who, on stage, has been seen variously as rejected, respected, tender, loving, passionate, resolute, fierce, innocent, complicit, devout, aggressive, oblivious, ingenuous, ambitious, cossetted, unrequited lover, self-styled celebrity, tyrant's wife, everywoman. She is, therefore, a prismatic figure of affective, political, and spiritual dimensions, caught up in the dilemmas of royal power and journeying towards an awareness of the weight of the hollow crown and the consequences of its loss.

Notes

1. 1.1.131; 5.1.22; 5.1.37; 5.1.54; 5.1.78; 5.1.87. All quotations from the play are from *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, second edition, edited by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor.

2. Notably, Maggie Blake played the Queen in the 1999 production in the Stratford Festival, Ontario, Canada, when she was sixteen.
3. Frank Benson played the role of Richard II at the at the Stratford Memorial Theatre virtually every year between 1896 and 1915 and his performance was made famous by C. E. Montague, who saw him as successfully portraying "the capable and faithful artist in the same skin as the incapable and unfaithful king". Montague's essay established a tradition of regarding Richard as the poet king and Bolingbroke as one of "the men of affairs" that would haunt interpretation and reception of the role into the mid-1950s. (Montague, Review of *Richard II*).
4. Barbara Hogdon notes that among the stage business that attached "romantic, 'gentlemanly' ironies" to Herbert Beerbhom Tree's Richard was his "tender, protective care" for his Queen: Tree brought Aumerle into this scene and "when the lovers part, Richard also embraces Aumerle and hands him over to the Queen" (Hodgdon, *The End Crowns All*, 131-132).
5. Concept and text edit, Adjoa Andoh. Notably, Andoh and Linton's *Richard II* was the first ever production of the play by an all women-of-colour company to be performed on a major UK stage.
6. Whilst Ostovich and Williams both favour casting a child actor in the role of the Queen, and such a practice would be interesting and informative, I focus on the interpretations of mature actors who have played the role.
7. My approach is informed by Elin Diamond's intertextual reading of Brechtian theory and feminist theory (Diamond, "Brechtian Theory").
8. PI indicates personal interview with the actor. I am indebted to the actors Genevieve O'Reilly (Nunn, 2005), Pippa Bennett-Warner (Grandage, 2011), Leigh Quinn (Doran, revived 2016), and Adjoa Andoh (Andoh and Linton, 2019) who generously gave their time to meet with me and discuss their work on *Richard II*.
9. Images of Richard's emblem, the white hart, are frequently used in production programmes and deployed in performance. As the white hart features on the blue robes of the angels figured in the Wilton Diptych, Doran's backdrop for the entrance of the Queen cited the Marian blue which is one of the Diptych's predominant colours.
10. The white hart "lying on a bank of foliage among branches of rosemary" is also "[p]ainted on the side uppermost when the Diptych is closed" (Saul, *Richard II*, 304-305).
11. The boy Richard was played by Thomas Ashdown and Frederick Neilson.
12. Tony Blair referred to Diana as "the people's princess" in an address broadcast 31 August 1997, the day of Princess Diana's death. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q3qinDH_3HE> [accessed 16 April 2021].
13. Princess Diana stated that she would like to be "a queen of people's hearts". Transcript of "An Interview with H.R.H Princess of Wales", *Panorama* BBC1 20 November 1995. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/special/politics97/diana/panorama.html> [accessed 16 April 2021].
14. I accept that figuring the Queen as Princess Diana is problematic, not least because of the Diana's status as a mother and the Queen's childlessness, but other identifiable resonances make the connection rewarding to this discussion of the character's contradictions.
15. The box was also used variously as the dais for the throne; the weapon store from which axes for the duel were taken; the tool box which contained the gardeners' implements; the mirror of 4.1; and the cell in which Richard stood to deliver his prison soliloquy.

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