Royalty and Divine Right in William Shakespeare's Histories *King John* and *Richard II*

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Le but de cet article est d'étudier les significations du concept de royauté, son étendue et ses limites, reflétées dans l'œuvre de Shakespeare, surtout dans les pièces King John et de Richard II. L'importance d'un tel sujet est évident dans l'époque de Shakespeare, et ses œuvres reflètent les intérêts politiques de ses contemporains. Nous avons l'intention de présenter la question de la royauté du point de vue des « deux corps du roi » et de la relation entre ces deux éléments de l'identité du roi. Par conséquent, l'idée de la royauté est présenté sur le ***plan politique****, concernant les éléments qui légitiment les actes d'un roi, les attributs divins du roi, le droit de juger, de se rebeller contre ou de déposer un roi sacré, ainsi que sur le* ***plan personnel****, concernant l'identité du roi, et ce qui arrive à un homme quand il perd cette partie de son identité.*

Key Words: king, body natural, body politic, legitimacy, deposition, English history

Royal Legitimacy and Divine Right

The rights and limitations of kings, their legitimacy, their authority as well as their responsibilities were issue of great interest in Shakespeare's time, when England was ruled by a childless queen and was facing external threats and internal strife. Who has the right to be a king? How large is the authority of the king? Is there anyone who can judge or depose a king? This vivid interest in the image of the king is reflected in Shakespeare's histories concerned with deposed kings, heroic kings, mad kings, evil kings, weak kings, facets of royalty that become as many investigations of the rights and limits of kingship, of the complicated relationships between king and people, of the right manner to exercise such an immense power.

In order to analyze the representations of kingship in Shakespeare's histories, two important elements must be taken into consideration: 1. the image of the medieval king, his royal prerogatives and legitimacy, and 2. the elements that resonate with the Elizabethan public, willing to comment on the dramatized events from their own vantage point and in the light of their own representations of kingship. A dominant theme in Shakespeare's histories, the royal power is seen from the perspective of its legitimacy, authority as well as its limits. While dramatizing the lives and deeds of kings and queens of the past, Shakespeare is fully aware that his public is able to make connections to situations and dilemmas closer to their interests, so that he consciously brings forward for discussion contemporary tensions under the pretext of staging stories from the past. Any debate over the monarchy, any such controversy presented in a historical play,

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would have echoed in his present, in a world marked by the reign of an heirless queen, Elizabeth I, and then the ascension to the throne of a king whom the English people felt a stranger to their interests, King James Stuart of Scotland.

King John and *King Richard II* dramatize two different episodes in the history of medieval England: the reign of one of the most hated kings in English history, King John, named also Lackland (1166 – 1216), and the reign of a presumably mad king, Richard II (1367 – 1400), deposed by his cousin, the future king Henry IV. Apparently, there would be no connection between a play in which a king strives to keep his throne and demonstrate his legitimacy (*King John*) and another in which the king, too sure of his own divine rights, commits too many mistakes that cost him the crown (*Richard II*). At a closer look, however, both plays are debates on the legitimacy of royal power, the use or abuse of royal prerogatives as well as the limitations of royal authority, and also on the human and the divine rights invoked by kings to secure their power. All these elements are recurrent point of tension from the Middle Ages to the reign of the Tudor and Stuart kings.

In the medieval world, the image of the king is complex and he has a variety of attributes and functions. Firstly, the king needs to be a representative of the aristocracy, yet superior to them, through his sacred attributes. The Christian king is "God's image" (Le Goff, 2002: 645), His messenger and so, he is different from all the other aristocrats because he symbolizes the connection between the humanity and the divinity, between God and the human subjects. Jean-Paul Roux asserts that, regardless of the words used to refer to him, the Christian king is the representative of God on earth (1998: 271). This is the reason why the king does not submit to human judgment and can only answer to God. This connection to the divinity suggests that the king must have a strong relationship to the Church, and in order to be fully acknowledged, he has to be blessed by the Church. In the medieval world, the king as to show his faith in God as well as his submission to the Church; he also has to protect peace, uphold justice, and attend to the needs of his subjects (Le Goff, 2002: 648).

The Church acquires a crucial role in the exercise of royal power, hence the countless conflicts and tensions between these two poles of authority: Church and King. John Neville Figgis tries to give a more compact definition of the King's divine right, naming four principles: "(1) *Monarchy is a divinely ordained institution*; (2) *Hereditary right is indefeasible.* The succession to monarchy is regulated by the law of primogeniture. The right acquired by birth cannot be forfeited through any acts of usurpation, of however long continuance, by any incapacity in the heir, or by any act of deposition. So long as the heir lives, he is king by hereditary right, even though the usurping dynasty has reigned for a thousand years. (3) *Kings are accountable to God alone.* Monarchy is pure, the sovereignty being entirely vested in the king, whose power is incapable of legal limitation. All law is a mere concession of his will, and all constitutional forms and assemblies exist entirely at his pleasure. He cannot limit or divide or alienate the sovereignty, so as in any way to prejudice the right of his successor to its complete

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exercise. A mixed or limited monarchy is a contradiction in terms. (4) *Non-resistance and passive obedience are enjoined by God*. Under any circumstances resistance to a king is a sin, and ensures damnation. Whenever the king issues a command directly contrary to God's law, God is to be obeyed rather than man, but the example of the primitive Christians is to be followed and all penalties attached to the breach of the law are to be patiently endured" (1914: 6-7). This definition reinforces the king's connection to the divinity and suggests the fact that, at least in theory, the king is protected from any human intervention in his prerogatives and rights.

The coronation and the anointment of the king become central ceremonies that establishe his legitimacy and so, many kings, more or less entitled to the crown, have used it to assert their power (King John, for instance, had several coronations). Cathedrals such as Westminster in England, or Reims in France, become symbolic places in the pompous tradition of royal coronations.

According to the divine right of kings, in England, as well as in all the other Christian kingdoms, the relationship between the king and the divinity is considered of utmost importance, giving the king a supplementary authority on his subjects. In a world dominated by the feudal laws, the Angevin kings, see their kingdom as their own property, in a similar way to that of a lord's dominion over his land and his vassals. But the king is more than a worldly owner, he is anointed, and so, his prerogatives and rights are much wider than those of any other aristocrat: "the king had a recognized duty to protect the Church and maintain justice; he possessed a special authority over coinage and the main roads (the 'king's highway'); while the barons did homage to him, he did not do homage to them; all adult males took an oath of allegiance to him; he could not be sued; some offences fell only under his jurisdiction; and he was hedged about with the distinctive symbolism of regality" (Bartlett, 2000: 122). Henry II, King John's father, for instance, justified his right to the throne not by having been name heir, but by the fact that England was given to him as a gift, Stephen being only the usurper of his right (Bartlett, 2000: 10), which suggests that, in the conscience of the medieval ruler, the divine authority preceded the human authority.

The connection between the king and the Church, or better said, the submission of the king to ecclesiastic authority was not favored by the English monarchs, whose frequent conflicts with the Church culminated, in the sixteenth century, during King Henry VIII's reign, with the break of the English Church from the authority of the Pope and the instauration of an absolute monarchy. Even under such circumstances, the king does not relinquish the justification of his presence on the throne of England by appealing to the divine right. This theory of the "providential monarchy" allows the king to claim power under the direct justification of the divine right, which makes the king independent from the will of the Church or from the control of the other institutions of the state.

Under the protection of such claims, the Tudor and Stuart rulers used a wide variety of political and religious means to ensure the success and the efficiency of

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the king's divine right (Carroll, 2003: 132). Consequently, the main duty of the subjects, from the king's perspective, is their submission to God's will. Being in a relatively unsafe position on the throne of England, Queen Elizabeth insisted, since the beginning of her reign, on her authority, fiercely guarding her prerogative and freedom of action in the name of the legitimate connection between the throne and the divinity. Similarly, she insisted on the sacred condition of the king, insisting that "it was necessary not only to believe the word of a prince but also to assume his good intentions" (Baldwin Smith, 1975: 63) even when appearances might be misleading and therefore, nobody has the right to bring prejudice to the king, in any way. Queen Elizabeth underlined the relationship between the throne and the king as a tool in her political affairs, legitimizing her rights in front of a hostile Europe, as well as in her internal affairs, and reminding everyone, sometimes in a brutally direct manner, that she was "Supreme Governor of this Church, next only to God" (Baldwin Smith, 1975: 166). King James used the same methods. Once on the English throne, he justified his legitimacy by mentioning his divine right: the kings are chosen by God, are like God and do not obey human laws, therefore, there is no reason through which a citizen or a group of people might try to overthrow a legitimate king (Baldwin Smith, 1975: 126).

One of the most efficient methods of justification of the king's divine right is the theory of the king's two bodies: the "body politic" and the "body natural" that separated the king, ruler of the state and lawgiver, from the human being, subject to disease and death. This theory had important effect in English politics: "one can easily see the advantages to the monarchical position in such a theory, since no *personal* action of the monarch could be invalidated, and no matter how incompetent or diseased the monarch was, as king he was nevertheless perfect (Carroll, 2003: 128). This is why the king does not obey any human authority and he cannot be deposed either by Parliament, or by popular revolt, all these act being, in this light, a betrayal of God's will.

Though the theory of the divine right stands at the basis of the process of legitimizing royal authority, the practice becomes much more complicate. The more numerous the attempts of legitimating (King John, for instance, was crowned three time, but this did not strengthened his authority), the more fragile the king's power is. Therefore, this need to legitimize the king's authority through the invocation of the sacred has, on the one hand, the role to ensure the obedience of the subjects and, on the other hand, it is meant to protect the king, regardless of the decisions he takes. Such mechanisms were, at times, so powerful, as to favor the presence on the throne of tyrannical, infantile or mad kings. At the same time, they opened the debate on the king's authority and limitations, and the symbolic traces of such controversies are visible, even today, in history and literature.

King John and *Richard II*

Critics and editors did not establish with utmost precision the year of composition of the play *The Life and Death of King John*. They however agree on

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the years 1596-1597, though the play was not published in the *quarto* editions of the plays, being included only in the *folio* edition of 1623. *Richard II* was written in 1595 and unlike *King John*, it was published in all the *quarto* editions (1597, 1598, 1608, 1616) as well as in the *folio* edition of 1623, where it follows *King John* in the arrangement of the plays.

The similarity between the successoral situations in King John's England and in King Richard's time is extremely interesting and demonstrates the evolution of the successoral principle in a number of generations, insisting on the gradual change of successoral laws from an elective monarchy towards a hereditary one. In this context, the parallelism between successoral situations in the two plays leading to different solutions reinforces the gradual development of the English monarchy towards the imposition of the hereditary principle and of the king's divine right.

Just like Arthur of Brittany, King John's nephew, son of Henry II's eldest son, who was never king, Richard II is just a child when he becomes king, and he is the grandson of the king, without being the son of a king. Similarly, both Arthur and Richard have powerful and ambitious uncles (King John and the Duke of Gloucester, respectively) who want the crown. However, if in the twelfth century the elective principle favors King John, not Arthur, that is the named heir (King John was appointed king by his dying brother Richard I), not the successor in dynastic line (Arthur, the first born of King Henry II's first born), in the fourteenth century, the right of the primogeniture triumphs, though it does not completely eliminate other pretenders to the throne. King Richard is king because he is the eldest son of King Edward III's eldest son, and so, his right to the throne is not challenged, as in the case of King John, by successoral traditions, customs or laws. When his cousin, Henry Bolingbrook claims the crown of England, he cannot successfully do it only by claiming that he is also a grandson of King Edward III, just like Richard. The royal blood is, at this point in history, not sufficient in deposing a rightful king and Richard's divine right is emphatically repeated all along the Shakespearean drama. Henry Bolingbrook needs to rely on the fact that Richard, despite his divine right, is unfit to be a king and the harm inflicted to the country is much more serious than the sin of deposing an anointed king.

If King John has to legitimize and secure his right to the throne by diplomatic ability or military force, King Richard II finds his position, which had apparently been firmly-grounded in the belief in the king's divine right, threatened by his own cousin, whose claim to the throne is twofold: an unjust king cannot be God's messenger and must be eliminated before harming the country and Henry, grandson of a King, has the right to wear the crown.

Though both plays are interested in defining the perfect ruler, by tackling the problem of the king's prerogatives, rights and limitations, the main difference between *King John* and *Richard II* lies in the manner in which the concept of kingship evolves along the ages. In *King John*, legitimizing the right to the throne is the main interest of the participants in the conflict, and only later, in the light of this doubtful right to the crown, his abilities as a ruler become questionable. This is

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the reason why the references to the divine right of the kings are not as frequent as in other plays. Being a right invoked by both parts, it is no longer sufficient to ensure, alone, John's legitimacy to the throne. In his world, John needs traditional justifications as well as military force and diplomatic skill to secure the crown for himself.

In the second play under discussion, Richard's legitimacy is beyond question: he is a king with divine rights. Shakespeare reinforces in his character the ideas about kingship of the real Richard II, who "certainly believed in the sacredness of his office and in the 'liberty' of his Crown more strongly than any of his predecessors, and devoted all his energies to the establishment of a despotism" (Figgis, 1914: 75-6). The challenges to Richard's position are prompted by his unjust actions, and the noblemen start asking themselves if there is any authority in this world, even the divine authority, to allow such acts to go unpunished[1].

Ruling in God's Name

As Robert Shaughnessy notices, the beginning of the two plays sets the tone for the manner in which royalty is to be seen and history presented: in *Richard II*, history has "dignity and purpose, its agents motivated both by self-interest and lofty principle," whereas in *King John* it is a matter of "chance, coincidence, expediency, opportunism and accident" (2011: 146). All the references to the king, to his legitimacy, rights and obligations, the type of behavior at the court, the relationships between the king and the other noblemen, all these very complicated mechanisms that regulate court life are ruled, in the two plays, by these two particular views on history. In this light, the beginning of the two plays, very similar in composition (the king is required to judge a dispute between two noblemen) aptly suggests how different the two courts are. If Richard's court "is defined by its observance of due process and its monarch securely invested with divinely sanctioned authority," *King John*'s opening "casts its nominal protagonist's authority comically in doubt" (Shaughnessy, 2011: 148). What in *Richard II* becomes a very serious dispute concerning issues such as loyalty and treason, King John is required to judge a domestic quarrel over the inheritance of one of the English lords. Thus, unlike King John's court, King Richard's is much more ritualized, celebrating the royal prerogatives. Each interaction between King Richard and his noblemen follows a strict protocol, much stricter than the one in King John's court, suggesting the respect for the king. The great number of characters participating in the scene suggests the importance of such an event: the king judging a dispute between aristocrats. The king, the quarrelling noblemen,

[1] It is worth mentioning, at this point, that *Richard II* opens a series of plays, grouped in two tetralogies. Even if the order of composition of the plays does not follow the historical order of events, one of the main interests of Shakespeare's histories remains the legitimacy of the king and his divine right. In fact, all along these historical plays, the deposition of Richard II rests like an omen on the future kings, who, related to Henry Bolingbroke, the one who deposed Richard, constantly need to reinforce their rights and their claim to the throne.

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other noblemen, courtiers and servants – they all have a precise role and obey a strict ritual that emphasizes the importance of such an event in the feudal order as well as the legitimacy of Richard's participation as king and judge. By comparison, King John's court seems oddly isolated. Beside the king, his mother and the late lord's sons, the presence of other participants being rare and insignificant. The dispute itself, in the context of a play marked by international conflict, challenged rights, sieges, battles, treason, seems almost insignificant, casting, from the very beginning, John's claims to the throne into ridicule.

However, at a closer look, the very nature of the disputes that the two kings are required to settle sets the tone and announces the main problem to govern each play: inheritance in *King John* and treason in *Richard II*.

In a play like *King John* in which all the main participants to the political game, men and women, kings, princes, lords, and queens, all are interested in power and try to legitimize their claims, the first dispute is related to rights of inheritance. King John, whose main problem in the play is to demonstrate his right to the throne of England: by law, by divine right or by military power, has to decide whether the title and possessions of the late Lord Faulconbridge should be inherited by the older and presumably bastard son or by the younger, natural son. The younger brother has two reasons to support his cause: the fact that his older brother is not really his father's son, but a bastard of Richard Coeur-de-Lion, and secondly, a will he claims his father wrote to give him the inheritance. Disregarding these proofs, King John decides to favor the right of the first-born. By ruling in such a manner, John "undermines his own claim to the English crown" (Mason Vaughan, 2003: 381) firstly because it is not based on the right of the primogeniture, and secondly because he rules in favor of a bastard son, while later arguing that his nephew, Arthur, is not entitled to the throne because he might be a bastard and not a natural son of his older brother. The importance of this first scene relies, therefore, in casting a shadow upon King John's claims to the throne as well as on his ability as a king and ruler. Though, for the first half of the play, he does not prove to be a bad king, nor have totally invalid rights to the throne, King John will ultimately demonstrate, through his acts, he is an "ungodly" king, unworthy and incapable of ruling the country.

In *Richard II* the dispute is different and the accusations are more serious: Henry Bolingbroke, the king's cousin, accuses Thomas Mowbray of high treason, murder and conspiracy involving the death of the Duke of Gloucester, Richard and Henry's uncle. The king, who is supposed to settle the conflict and uphold justice, hesitates in giving a definitive answer, deciding to let a duel decide who is right and who is wrong. However, no sooner does the herald announce the beginning of the combat, than Richard changes his mind again, stops the fight and punishes both lords by banishment. In this manner, Richard provokes his own downfall, since he hesitates in behaving according to the expectations people have from a divinely-ordained king – to uphold justice, to punish treason and to side with the righteous. Richard undermines his own position, a position that, at the beginning, seems

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definitely more secure and validated by the others than King John's, and starts a rule of hesitation, ambiguities, and double-entendres. In this respect, D. Cavanaugh speaks of the play's "ambiguity" while referring to a change in the perspective on treason. In the play, treason is no longer clearly defined and subsequently punished, and becomes a more fluid concept, changing with the shift in historical circumstances: "Repeatedly, treachery is defined in the struggle to constitute or diminish authority, and by the language used to substantiate this; as such, it can be modified, contested, and redefined in relation to varying claims of legitimacy." (1999) Therefore, all along the play, it is uncertain who is right and who is wrong, who is the traitor and who is the representative of justice, and by shedding this ambiguity over the relationship between power and submission, the very name and legitimacy of the supreme representative of power, the king, becomes questionable.

As we have seen, therefore, the opening scenes of the two plays under discussion are extremely important in understanding the manner in which the idea of kingship is going to be examined in the respective text: how people relate to the king and to the royal power, and how the person who is king sees his own legitimacy, rights and obligations. Thus, the main discussion in the two plays revolves around the relationship between the "body politic" and the "body natural," between the political function of the divinely-ordained king and the person fulfilling the function. And all along the two plays, the kings try to cling to their positions, legitimizing their claim to the throne and their acts by appealing to the name of God and to their privileged position as God's messengers on earth, while, at the same time, undermining this position by their acts and political decisions.

King John

King John reflects the tension between the liberties offered by the appeal to the divine right as well as the limitations coming from the human condition of the one who wants power, especially in a problematic succession. In the play, King John sees himself in complete accordance to the medieval spirit, as "*God's wrathful agent*" ready to "*correct* / *Their* [France, England's enemies] *proud contempt that beats His peace to heaven.*" (II.i.88-9) However, assuming this sacred condition is not sufficient to make him untouchable, since the other party, his rivals, appeal to the same strategy: "*The peace of heaven is theirs that lift their swords/ In such a just and charitable war*." (Duke of Austria, II.i.36-7) This is the reason why the play unfolds mainly around the human dimension of the intrigues and plots devised by one party or the other in order to legitimize their claims. Though the claims to the rights are presented in pompous words and almost credible justification, they all collapse against the background dominated by hazards, accidents, personal interest and human pettiness. Such a view on kingship suggests that the legitimacy and the authority of the monarch are controlled by hazard, coincidence and instability, and in King John's world the efforts of the one who claim the throne of England and of their supporters seem exaggerated and useless.

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King John's questionable claims are emphasized, from the very beginning, by his own mother, Queen Elinor, who draws her son's attention that his presence on the English throne is not a matter of divine justice:

KING JOHN
Our strong possession and our right for us.
QUEEN ELINOR
Your strong possession much more than your right,
Or else it must go wrong with you and me:
So much my conscience whispers in your ear,
Which none but heaven and you and I shall hear (I.i. 41-4).

In the queen's words, John's claim to the crown is founded more on "strong possession", on military power, and the invocation of heaven ironically resembles more a ridiculous plot between the divine, the new king and his mother than a matter of divinely ordained righteousness. By correcting her son in his bold assertion of his rights, Elinor undermines his authority, from the very first scene, reducing the image of the King of England, to that of a son who made a mistake and is reprimanded by the parent. At this point in the play, the audience is not aware of the real character of John, or of the legitimacy of his right to the throne, or even of his abilities to be a good ruler for England, but it alludes to the fact that John would prove his unworthiness, sooner or later in the play. Similarly, by questioning the "divine right" to the throne, Queen Elinor sets the tone of the play, in the sense that the name of God will not be too often mentioned to support John's position.

Actually, the instances in which the divine right of the king to the throne are mentioned are connected to the dispute between France, supporting Arthur's right to the throne, and England, with its King John. In the discussion between the pretenders to the throne of England, it becomes clear that this argument is not the winning argument, as it is used by both parties with no end. The anointed king, God's agent, becomes a hollow, empty argument, believed and upheld by none in the play. It is a mere "commodity", to use the words of another rightful pretender to the throne of England, the Bastard of King Richard I, who actually never claims the throne. This idea is supported by the manner in which the Pope's legate, Cardinal Pandulph, addresses the two rivals: "*Hail, you anointed deputies of heaven!*" (III.i.139). In his eyes, both King John and the King of France are rightful, divinely ordained kings, but not because he recognizes this prerogative, and hence John's legitimacy to the throne of England. It is merely because he has an interest in protecting the domains and the powers of the Church in England. His words make it clear that this "divine" prerogative can be bargained according to the benefits the Church can draw out of its acceptance or rejection. Thus, if for Queen Elinor the divine right is superseded by "strong possession", that is, by military ability and force, for Cardinal Pandulph, the same divine right is a merchandise to be given or taken to whoever offers more.

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The result of this process of emptying the idea of kingship of all its meaning and importance becomes obvious in the behavior of all the participants on the political scene that becomes dominated by violence, ambiguity, insecurity, hesitations, treason, rebellion, disobedience, everything that is prone to lead to the ruin of the kingdom. The king becomes a murderer, by having his nephew killed, the English aristocrats make a shameful alliance with the Dauphin of France, England is under attack from the outside and undermined from the inside. In this situation, the king can no longer rise to the obligations required by the position he so much coveted. The only one who makes an attempt to reassert the value and the role of the king for the country is the Bastard who urges John to behave like a true king and be an example for a country adrift:

Be great in act, as you have been in thought;
Let not the world see fear and sad distrust
Govern the motion of a kingly eye:
Be stirring as the time; be fire with fire;
Threaten the threatener and outface the brow
Of bragging horror: so shall inferior eyes,
That borrow their behaviors from the great,
Grow great by your example and put on
The dauntless spirit of resolution.
Away, and glister like the god of war,
When he intendeth to become the field:
Show boldness and aspiring confidence (V.i. 47-58).

These words make it clear that the "body politic" is supposed to be the most important aspect, the image of the king, the example he must set for the country, the determination and ruling abilities must subdue the weaknesses, "fear" and "sad distrust" of the "body natural." The king is no longer a simple, humble mortal man; he becomes a symbol of the country, an example of valor, righteousness and greatness, all these ideas stressed in the Bastard's words.

However, John is not capable of understanding that the position he wanted so much requires a certain attitude and type of behavior and he cannot overcome his fears and weaknesses to be, in the last hour, a true king. Thus, the cleavage between the "body politic" and the "body natural" becomes unbridgeable and the dying John does not see himself any longer as a king, but only as a man in pain. Actually, his final words are dominated by a sense of dissolution, of degradation and disappearance into nothingness, suggesting that John is not God's agent, as he once claimed, but a mere suffering human, returning to the clay from which he was created, a tormented soul, a passing shadow leaving no trace on this earth:

"Ay, marry, now my soul hath elbow-room;
It would not out at windows nor at doors.
There is so hot a summer in my bosom,
That all my bowels crumble up to dust:
I am a scribbled form, drawn with a pen

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Upon a parchment, and against this fire
Do I shrink up" (V. vii. 31-37).

Later, just before dying, when the Bastard comes to see him, he says: "*And then all this thou seest is but a clod* / *And module of confounded royalty*" (V. vii. 62-3). King John, in this final scene, is no longer "King", but remains only human, subdued to fears, frailty and dissolution. In his final hour, John gives up any claim to royalty or power. In the face of physical pain and of death, the "divine" powers of the king crumble to dust and are reduced to nothingness, reinforcing, thus, the main idea of the play: the idea of royalty is a mask, not a reality, and the best king is the one who can best play the role in front of the people (the Bastard enhances this idea in times in trouble). The divine condition of the king, God's protection for His anointed, all these are political means of legitimization, justification and political manipulation. Death, the all-leveler, reduces these claims to nothingness.

King Richard II

The name of God, the one with supreme power who blesses the king, is much more frequently used in *Richard II* than in *King John*. Unlike the latter case, where the sacred is marginalized and the world is dominated by interest and "commodity", in Richard's court, the characters often invoke God's mercy, they pray or promise in the name of God, reinforcing the importance of God's providence in a country where the king rules by divine right, is blessed by God and deserves the obedience of his subjects. In this way, the position of King Richard II on the throne of England is greatly strengthened in opposition to the position of King John. Nobody, in *Richard II*, questions the right of Richard to wear the English crown, hence the frequent references to the "anointed" king, to his "sacred" position, to him being protected by God. The accusations against Richard are prompted by his actions that seem to contradict his "sacredness" and not by his legal right to be on the throne, as in the case of King John. In the play, this contrast between the image of the "divine King", ruling over a highly ritualized court is contrasted to the image of Richard outside the public sphere. The real character of Richard, the man, becomes evident in the private space, where he plots, threatens and abuses his privileged position. This contradiction between what the king is supposed to represent and what he actually does is felt by the lords who, though enraged by his acts and his attitude, hesitate in deposing him. This hesitation comes from the belief that nothing can justify any rebellion or betrayal of against a divinely ordained king, an act which would be equal to blasphemy. This is the reason why there are several attempts, in the play, to protect the "sacred position" of the king, to correct his behavior or to find justifications for his acts before accepting the possibility of deposition.

The first one to comment on the king's actions, but refusing to act against him is his own uncle, John of Gaunt, who is in a very delicate position since he is the king's uncle and so, he is expected to stand by his side, being, therefore, unable to protect his own son from the king's unjust decision, or to revenge the death of his

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brother, the Duke of Gloucester. His refusal to act against his nephew is justified by the fact that he, as a human being, cannot question the will of God:

God's is the quarrel; for God's substitute,
His deputy anointed in His sight,
Hath caused his death: the which if wrongfully,
Let heaven revenge; for I may never lift
An angry arm against His minister (I. ii. 38-42).

However, on his deathbed, enraged by the unbroken series of injustices perpetrated by Richard against his family, John of Gaunt has the courage to confront the king. In his words, two elements are of great importance in understanding the vision on kingship and the difficulty in rising against God's messenger. First of all, Gaunt argues that the decay of the king is caused by the hypocritical and disloyal favorites rather than by his own weaknesses:

And thou, too careless patient as thou art,
Commit'st thy anointed body to the cure
Of those physicians that first wounded thee:
A thousand flatterers sit within thy crown,
Whose compass is no bigger than thy head;(II. i. 98-102).

Bushy, Bagot and Green, named by Henry Bolingbroke "*The caterpillars of the commonwealth,/ Which I have sworn to weed and pluck away*" (II. iii. 167-8) will, actually, be forced to pay with their lives for having led a sacred king to his ruin. The blame, thus, in the eyes of the people, rests not entirely in the king, who is a divine person, but in his followers who have misled him.

The second element invoked by Gaunt in his speech to Richard alludes to the privileged position of the king as supreme lord of the country. According to John Neville Figgs, after the Norman Conquest, the king is "not only the national representative, but also supreme landowner: all land is held of him mediately or immediately" (1914: 22). However, the king is more than landlord, he is part of the aristocracy, connected to the noblemen, but above them regarding the rights that he has. Robert Bartlett regards it as a combination of "Rulership" and "Ownership". Thus, on the one hand, "kings did regard the kingdom as their patrimony, something they inherited by right and owned, in the same way that a baron owned and inherited his estate;" on the other hand, though, "kingship provided a foundation of claims that were inherently wider and, given the right circumstances, capable of greater expansion than those of any non-royal lord" (2000: 122).

By referring to the king's privilege of being the supreme landowner, Gaunt actually accuses Richard of taking advantage of this position, and, by doing so, the king, in fact, breaks the divine laws that allow him to be king, connecting him to the country, the land and the people.

O, had thy grandsire with a prophet's eye
Seen how his son's son should destroy his sons,
From forth thy reach he would have laid thy shame,
Deposing thee before thou wert possess'd,

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Which art possess'd now to depose thyself.
Why, cousin, wert thou regent of the world,
It were a shame to let this land by lease;
But for thy world enjoying but this land,
Is it not more than shame to shame it so?
Landlord of England art thou now, not king:
Thy state of law is bondslave to the law; And thou – (II. i. 105-115).

Gaunt uses words referring to possession, or lack of possession (*to depose, possess*), to ownership (*to let the land, lease, landlord, regent, king*), and avoids referring to Richard directly as "king," calling him "cousin" and stressing upon the fact that they are from the same family, and that he abuses a position that comes not only with privileges, but also with responsibilities.

This is the first step in the rather complicated matter of deposing Richard of his crown and, in his speech, Gaunt tries to separate the "human" part of Richard from the "divine" suggesting that Richard behaves more like a mere human being, abusing his position, "shaming" it, and less like a divine king, worthy of his place inherited from his "grandsire." This division between the "body natural" and the "body politic" becomes, in this play, both a political matter, providing the rebels with a legal justification for their illegal actions, as well as a personal matter, of a more profound character, leading to Richard's tragic end.

The participants in this political game try to preserve the "body politic" intact while attacking only the "body natural," the part that they consider diseased. They do not want to attack the idea of royalty because Henry Bolingbroke wants to become king and be considered, in his turn, a "rightful," hence "divine" ruler. They only want to demonstrate that Richard, evil, tyrannical and corrupt, is not a "sacred" king, but a usurper. This division between the "body natural" and the "body politic" is also evident in the Duke of York's words while he, as the king's deputy, is forced to handle Henry's rebellion:

DUKE OF YORK
Tut, tut!
Grace me no grace, nor uncle me no uncle:
I am no traitor's uncle; and that word 'grace.'
In an ungracious mouth is but profane.
[…]Comest thou because the anointed king is hence?
Why, foolish boy, the king is left behind,
And in my loyal bosom lies his power.
Were I but now the lord of such hot youth (II. iii. 87-90, 97-100)

York dismisses Bolingbroke's rebellious claims by enforcing the idea that the "body politic" is a concept that does not disappear, or function intermittently, in the sense that, even if the king himself is not present, the royal authority can be exercised through his deputies. Even if "the anointed king" is "hence," that is, the person who had been anointed is not present, "the king is left behind," the power of

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the anointed king does not disappear when the king is away, his authority being felt even in his absence, so that, no one can usurp his power.

The act of deposing a divinely ordained monarch, politically speaking, was a very dangerous matter, not only in the times in which it occurred, but also in Shakespeare's time[2] and all the other historical plays are marked by Henry Bolingbroke's decision to take the crown from Richard II.

Though, Richard II's deeds seem to justify the decision to depose him, through the way in which Shakespeare handles the historical truth, it seems that such an extreme action against a divinely ordained king is not considered appropriate and is bound to have tragic consequences for the future generations, as a warning for Shakespeare's contemporaries who would envisage such a possibility. In *Richard II*, there is no clear contrast between an evil king who has to be deposed and a good and heroic savior of the kingdom in the person of Henry Bolingbroke: there is no such a contradiction in terms of good and evil and the characterization of the two is made rather in political terms – which of them is more skillful in handling the political matters in such a way as to convince the others of the righteousness of their cause. In this context, Richard makes the mistake of trusting too much his "sacredness", whereas Bolingbroke makes the mistake of trying to desacralize the idea of kingship in the attempt to assume the power. Thus, as Dermott Cavanaugh puts it, "In particular, the language of *Richard II* has been identified as expressing this shift from a world which assumes political values are divinely ordained, to one dominated by the functional pursuit and maintenance of power," (1999) and he refers especially to Henry's attempt to win the noblemen to his side with "oblique hints of the material advantage that will accrue from their loyalty." (Cavanagh, 1999)

Evermore thanks, the exchequer of the poor;
Which, till my infant fortune comes to years,
Stands for my bounty (II. iii. 66-8).

The opposition between this material justification of power and Richard's claims of sanctity is enforced by the Bishop of Carlisle's prophecy of the destruction of the country if the anointed king is deposed:

And if you crown him, let me prophesy:
The blood of English shall manure the ground,
And future ages groan for this foul act;
Peace shall go sleep with Turks and infidels,
And in this seat of peace tumultuous wars
Shall kin with kin and kind with kind confound;
Disorder, horror, fear and mutiny
Shall here inhabit, and this land be call'd
The field of Golgotha and dead men's skulls (IV. i. 138-146).

[2] The deposition scene was censored from several editions, and in 1601, the Earl of Essex ordered a performance of the play on the eve of his rebellion (Cf. E. Kantorowicz, 1957: 40).

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Carlisle's prophecy will woefully turn true in the future of England and the conflicts for power culminating with the War of the Roses ("kin with kin and kind with kind confound"), depicted in the other historical plays. The fact that Carlisle's prophecy becomes true suggests the political importance attached to the concept of royalty. The belief that the political stability and the welfare of the state depend on the unchallenged authority of the king formed the basis of the Tudor and the Stuart monarchs and Shakespeare's plays transmit this idea. Thus, on the political scene, there is not justification in forcefully separating the "body politic" from the "body natural" and in deposing a divinely ordained monarch from power.

The complexity of this play comes from the fact that the problem of the king's two bodies is investigated not only on the political level, but also on the personal level. Richard is not seen simply as a mad, greedy or evil person who, by history's whims, happened to become a king. The process of the king's deposition and the ending of the play reveal a more complex character than was expected at the beginning of the play. By investigating Richard's character, it becomes clear that he relates to royalty in a different manner than King John, for instance. If, for John, royalty was only a role to be played, a justification for his desire to have the power, it becomes obvious that for Richard, royalty is an intrinsic part of his identity, and not a simple mask. Charles L. Forker argues that "Richard's emotional volatility and psychological complexity, frequently discussed in other contexts, stem essentially from conflicts inherent in his dual role as king and man – as both rex imago Dei and as fallible mortal" (2001). All along the play, Richard genuinely sees himself as the representative of God, protected by Him, unlike King John whose references to God's protection are mere political justifications in which he does not believe too much, but which he uses as part of the traditional legitimization of the position he wants to occupy, namely that of King of England. In King John there is no inner division between his identity as man and his identity as king; he tries to fulfill a much-desired role, only to realize that the role was too difficult for him. Richard, on the other hand, is a tragic character and the play is, according to Ernst Kantorowicz, a "tragedy of the King's Two Bodies" (1957: 26).

Dwelling on three images that govern a similar number scenes in the play: the King (the scene on the Coast of Wales, III. ii), the Fool – Flint Castle (III. iii), and God (the Westminster scene, IV. iii), E. Kantorowicz investigates the gradual fall of Richard "from divine kingship to kingship's 'Name,' and from the name to the naked misery of man" (1957: 27). Richard does not use the name of God only to superficially legitimize his power, he firmly believes in his sacred position, in being the "deputy elected by the Lord" (III. ii) and defended by God's "glorious angel" who protects him from any mortal who would dare challenge his position. This is not a mask worn by Richard, it is Richard's truth, the manner in which he sees himself and the reason why he would be so shaken by the deposition that leads to a loss of a part of him, and to a split personality.

The deposition scene, according to E. Kantorowicz, is a scene of great emotional impact for the spectators: "The scene in which Richard 'undoes his

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kingship' and releases his body politic into thin air, leaves the spectator breathless. It is a scene of sacramental solemnity, since the ecclesiastical ritual of undoing the effects of consecration is no less solemn or of less weight than the ritual which has built up the sacramental dignity" (1957: 35). As the direct deputy of God, and hence superior to any mortal, he truly believes he is the only one who can "un-king himself". On the other hand, as human being, he realizes that he has to submit to other human powers and relinquish the power. There is no such ritual for the deposition of a king, as there is for the coronation, and so Richard, though defeated and humiliated, still manages to preserve his superiority by turning his failure into a great, breath-taking performance.

Now mark me, how I will undo myself;
I give this heavy weight from off my head
And this unwieldy sceptre from my hand,
The pride of kingly sway from out my heart;
With mine own tears I wash away my balm,
With mine own hands I give away my crown,
With mine own tongue deny my sacred state,
With mine own breath release all duty's rites:
All pomp and majesty I do forswear;
My manors, rents, revenues I forego;
My acts, decrees, and statutes I deny:
God pardon all oaths that are broke to me!
God keep all vows unbroke that swear to thee! (IV. i. 206-218).

Richard gives up, one by one, all the elements that make him king, but, the question is, what happens to a king after he ceases to be a king? What happens when the "body politic" is separated from the "body natural"? When somebody else assumes the role of King, what happens to the king who lost his crown? King Lear lives the same dilemma when his Fool tells him: "now thou art an O without a figure: I am better than thou art now; I am a fool, thou art nothing." (I.iv) A mere return to the state of humanity is not a possibility for a king, and so, as in the case of Lear, the loss of the kingly part of the self results not in becoming a simple man, but in nothingness:

HENRY BOLINGBROKE
Are you contented to resign the crown?
KING RICHARD II
Ay, no; no, ay; for I must nothing be;
Therefore no no, for I resign to thee (IV. i. 203-205).

The symbol of the broken mirror reflects Richard's loss of identity, marked not only by disunion between the "body natural" and the "body politic," but by a conflict between these two sides of the personality:

I find myself a traitor with the rest:
For I have given here my soul's consent
T'undeck the pompous body of a king (IV. i. 244).

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"That is, the king body natural becomes a traitor to the king body politic, to the 'pompous body' of a king" (Kantorowicz, 1957: 39). The result of such a conflict is split identity, multiple voices at quarrel with each other, dissolution and madness. Richard becomes a player, wearing many masks, but these masks are not meant to hide, as it usually happens, his identity, or his intentions. These masks only hide the lack of any substance behind them, since the king "un-king'd", oscillating between being a "king" and a "beggar" realizes that he was reduced to nothingness.

Thus play I in one person many people,
And none contented: sometimes am I king;
Then treasons make me wish myself a beggar,
And so I am: then crushing penury
Persuades me I was better when a king;
Then am I king'd again: and by and by
Think that I am unking'd by Bolingbroke,
And straight am nothing: but whate'er I be,
Nor I nor any man that but man is
With nothing shall be pleased, till he be eased
With being nothing (V. v. 31-41).

Interesting enough, Richard will return to being a king in death:

That hand shall burn in never-quenching fire
That staggers thus my person. Exton, thy fierce hand
Hath with the king's blood stain'd the king's own land.
Mount, mount, my soul! thy seat is up on high;
Whilst my gross flesh sinks downward, here to die (V. v. 109-113).

According Charles L. Focker, "Richard's body mystical will rise to rejoin the divine source of its sacramental power, while his body natural will sink down and dissolve to earth like that of other mortals. Regnal flaws notwithstanding, eternal condemnation is for regicides, not for legitimate monarchs" (2001). It is a reunification, in death, of the King's two bodies, and his murder is going to affect the country in the future, marking its political life.

Conclusions

Shakespeare's plays reflect the interest of his contemporaries in all the disputed connected to the idea of kingship and to the person who embodies this important role. Various types of kings, various disputes regarding successoral legitimacy, various manner of ruling, all presented in Shakespeare's plays suggest the importance attached to power, to its extent and its limitations.

King John and *King Richard II*, two plays that apparently have little in common beside the interest in the history of England, are, in fact, reflections on the relationship between the King's Two Bodies: the "body natural" and the "body politic" and on the divine aspect of royalty. If for King John, the sacredness of the king is part of the arsenal of political justifications, without believing too much in

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it, King Richard II firmly asserts his royal prerogatives, considering that he is truly a "divine king" under God's protection. In both plays, there is a disunion between the "body politic" and the "body natural:" the king becomes a simple human being. King John fails to rise to the requirements of his position and leaves the ruling of the country to other hands, dying in pain and realizing that, in spite of all his efforts, he is only "clod." King Richard reaches the same realization, that beyond the mask of royalty there is nothing, but his awareness comes after a long and humiliating process in which he has to "un-king" himself.

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