

“They told me I was everything”: Theatrical Reflections on Ideology, Governance, and King Lear’s Two Bodies

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Introduction

In the fourth act of Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, Lear, mad but still “every inch a king” (4.6.106), has a moment of clarity and says of Goneril and Regan:

They flattered me like a dog and told me I had the white hairs in my beard ere the black ones were there. To say ‘ay’ and ‘no’ to everything that I said ‘ay’ and ‘no’ to was no good divinity. When the rain came to wet me once and the wind to make me chatter; when the thunder would not peace at my bidding, there I found ‘em, there I smelt ‘em out. Go to, they are not men o’ their words: they told me I was everything; ‘tis a lie, I am not ague proof. (4.6.96-104)

Lear here strikes upon the heart of his fitful, tragic self-knowledge and does so in terms of his own fallible humanity vis-à-vis the abstract perfection of the role of king, which finds expression in the theatrically reified, perfect, and boundlessly authoritative totality of “everything.” He denounces Goneril and Regan’s sycophantism as no “good divinity,” i.e. “theology” (Foakes 334), because the circuitous reflection of absolute political authority has allowed him to believe the “lie”: that “the thunder would [...] peace at [his] bidding” and even that he is impervious to illness. He thus reveals that he has misguidedly interpreted the mystical aspects of sovereignty as being inherent to his own person and succumbed to the belief that he was more than human. In actuality, however, Lear’s abstract “everything”—the ideology of monarchy that he attempts to embody in retaining “the name, and all th’addition to the king” (1.1.137), is shown to be “nothing” without the belief or allegiance of others, which is in turn earned through the responsibilities of governance that Lear gives away. Though ultimately Lear’s opening actions of dividing both the kingdom and the role of kingship are shown to be mistakes, the play suggests that the position of King and its grandiose absolutism, derived partly from the paradoxical political theology of the era that held the king as both divine and mortal, serve as the primary conditions of possibility for Lear’s tragedy; the play thus ultimately offers a tempered sympathy for his misreading of kingship.

King Lear works to extricate the king’s particular natural body from the King’s abstract, constitutive political body and its metaphysical associations – with the crucial caveat that Lear can never wholly escape the ideology of monarchy, of which

his physical body is the unifying symbol. The play charts Lear’s trajectory from the potent meaning and absolute authority of “Royal Lear” (1.1.140) – an identity which, along with a god-like faultlessness, Lear believes he can retain in “the name, and all th’addition to the king” (1.1.137) – to his discovery of his bare physicality in the “poor, infirm, weak, and despised old man” (3.2.20) that Lear becomes on the heath, which he also suggests in dubbing Poor Tom “[u]naccommodated man” (3.4.105). The gap between Lear’s understanding of kingship’s supreme authority and its ultimate dependence on material governance of the kingdom – of which the Fool incessantly reminds him – thus speaks to his larger misunderstanding of the physical suffering of his own subjects that lie outside the narcissistic bounds of Lear’s “everything,” the same subjects who provide such a totalized view’s conceptual basis, the body politic. Ultimately, he empathizes with these “[p]oor naked wretches” and their “looped and windowed raggedness” (3.4.27, 31) through his own physical suffering well after his illusory identity of “everything” is dispelled. It is through this embodied and empathic discovery of humanity in Poor Tom that Lear experiences being subjected within and to his hypocritical discourse: Lear recognizes Poor Tom as the literal “thing itself” (3.4.104), the subject that ultimately constitutes kingship but is elided from Lear’s performance of absolute monarchy in which he sees only himself, yet himself as all things. Lear thus fitfully begins to “see” those outside the circumscribed narcissism of “everything” as things in themselves, beginning with Poor Tom but later including the Fool and Cordelia. This merging of horizons, this subsumption of both subject and monarch under one body politic urges that the nature of just governance relies on reciprocal acknowledgement between sovereign and subject. However, given that Lear’s self-knowledge is fitful at best and that ultimately the ideology of monarchy survives both Lear’s misreading and Lear himself, the ideology that enables the power to govern, rather than governance itself, takes center stage.

This essay, however, departs from arguments that provide overly agentic critiques of power in explaining Lear’s actions as sovereign and that thus fail to adequately treat the human logic of Shakespeare’s greatest tragedy. Rather, this essay articulates Lear’s tragedy as deriving from the tension between the embodiment of power and the ideological codification of power in society. The first section of my argument contextualizes the play within the cultural ideology of early modern political theo-

ry and reads *Lear* as partially drawing on and expressing the ambiguity between the legal delimitations of the Crown's divinely sanctioned powers and the flawed judgment of a mortal king, specifically dramatizing the lack of definition between the *king* and the *King*. I argue that, because the tension between *Lear's* humanity and the perfection of kingship forms its central tragedy, the play challenges political theology itself and, specifically, the theory of the King's Two Bodies.

The second section, though it specifically employs the language of theatrical performance as a method of analyzing the exchanges and relations between the sovereign and his/her subjects in this essay, pushes against traditional, vaguely moralistic arguments such as that of Paul Kottman in *Spectral Communities and Ghosts of Sovereignty: Interpreting Apparitions in "Hamlet" and "Macbeth,"* which attempts to clearly limit the scope of "theatricality" in order to save it from "blurring" into life and no longer holding its "critical potential" (98). Rather, I assume the perspective of contemporary performance, visual and political theory (see Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 2011) that the theatrical represents a particular cordoning off of the broader political/aesthetic performances of everyday social life. This section thus analyzes, in theatrical terms but without privileging agency, the sovereign spectacle in *Lear* as a circuitous theatre of recognition between the performer-as-sovereign and the spectator-as-subject and further articulates the play's advocacy for empathic humanism as the justification for governance rather than the theatrically achieved divinity of the monarch.

"Divine power" through its "resemblance": *Lear*, James I, and the persistence of ideology through the performance of power

Though certainly the theory of the King's Two Bodies should not and does not serve as a blueprint for *Lear's* actions or character, both of which are deeply complex and at times contradictory, echoes of its ideological import can be felt throughout the play. Ernst Kantorowicz elucidates in his seminal work *The King's Two Bodies*, through extensive analysis of Medieval and Renaissance theological and political thought, the political theology of the King's Two Bodies. This theory held that the sitting monarch had both a "Body natural" subject to infirmity, error, and old age – i.e., the mortal king's physical body – and an immortal "Body politic" (Plowden 186). Developed through legal argument in the Tudor period by English jurists as a means of resolving various tensions between existing law and emerging problems with the Renaissance state, this intricate theorem "provided an important heuristic fiction which served the lawyers at a certain time...to bring into agreement the personal with the more impersonal concepts of government" (Kantorowicz 5), such as by justifying dynastic continuity through the notion of a "king that never dies" (see Kantorowicz 314-317). Louis Montrose succinctly contextualizes this historical moment as:

[a] transitional position...between the medieval theological doctrine that all Christendom was a collective *corpus mysticum*, and what Quentin Skinner has called "the distinctly modern idea of the State as a form of public power separate from both the ruler and the ruled, and as constituting the supreme authority within a certain defined territory." During the second half of the sixteenth century, the monarchical claim to supreme authority within its territories was already securely established both in theory and practice, while formulations of the modern conception of the state as a corporate abstraction had only just begun. At this historical juncture, the body politic inhered in the body of the prince. (qtd. in Pye 3)

Thus, as the legal arguments collected and written by Edmund Plowden under Elizabeth I detail, the King's body politic was a fiction created primarily for the purpose of equipping the monarch with the right (and responsibility of) governance: the body politic "cannot be seen or handled, consisting of Policy and Government, and constituted for the Direction of the People, and the Management of the public weal" (Plowden 213).

However, Plowden's *Reports* also reveal that, rather than being merely an immaterial metaphor for the offices of government, the King's body politic was the key concept within a mystically charged political theology and worked, more often than not, to obscure the imperfect humanity of the sitting king. In order to justify consolidation of the growing state into the framework of monarchical rule, the Elizabethan jurists arguing the theory of the King's Two Bodies found it necessary to employ (most likely unconsciously, as Kantorowicz argues; see 18-19) theological language. Kantorowicz variously traces how the jurists engaged the problem of the king's human nature both in the doctrine's "secularization of the purging power of the sacraments" (12) in coronation "wip[ing] away every Imperfection of the [natural] Body" (Plowden 238) and in the jurists' development of a "Royal Christology" (12) in their attempt to define each of the Two Bodies' unique capacities, which mirrors christological definitions of Christ's Two Natures – the human and the divine. The theory thus creates the sitting king as perfect at the moment he is crowned and then provides the framework needed to justify the illusion of his perfection through christological association, which I later argue, following Pye, is achieved through regal spectacle and theatre (see conclusion to "Divine power" section and the "*Lear's* Shadow" section of this essay; Pye 2-16).

The Two Bodies solved certain major problems – such as justifying and consolidating dynastic continuity, the Crown as corporation, and the immortality of the king's office (Kantorowicz 316-317) – but the "strange solutio[n]" (Kantorowicz 317) of importing the logic of christology also imported, as Kantorowicz puts it, "all the christological problems of the early Church concerning the Two Natures" (17). Kantorowicz outlines several of these issues, linking them to various theo-

logical tenets, but most relevant to *King Lear* are the problems that arise from the doctrine's "touch of 'Monophysitism'" (18) (the christological idea that Christ is only divine in nature), the theory's resultant "relative indifference to the mortal 'incarnation' or individuation of the body politic" (18), and the "[c]onsiderable...danger" inherent to being unable "to establish a clear distinction 'between the will of the Crown and what the king wants'" (18). As one can imagine, the stakes of such a distinction were extremely high, primarily for the reason that, per the Plowden *Reports*,

this Body [politic] is utterly void of Infancy, and old Age, and other Natural Defects and Imbecilities, which the Body natural is subject to, and for this Cause, what the King does in his Body politic, cannot be invalidated or frustrated by any Disability in his natural Body. (Plowden 213)

This means, among other things, that if an action of the king could be argued to be done in his Body politic, it would be sanctified as infallible through the perfection of the office.

The Declaration of the Lords and Commons of May 27, 1642 clearly articulated the court's ability to separate the King's natural and politic capacities and seize sovereignty from the sitting *king* (as opposed to the position of *King*). Prior to that point, however, the legal codes were ambiguous enough to allow for advanced claims of divine right by James I and Charles I, which forced Parliament to overtly articulate that the King's,

Courts and Ministers...must do their duty [to the King], *though the King in his own Person should forbid them*: and therefore if Judgment should be given by them against the King's Will and Personal command, *yet are they the King's Judgments*. (qtd. in Kantorowicz 21; italics in original)

Thus, the "transitional position" that Montrose references in which the "state inhered in the body of the prince" carries much significance: prior to 1642, the boundaries of the state's capacities and those of the prince's will were yet to be clearly defined in law; Kantorowicz reveals as much in saying that the raw material for the 1642 Declaration was laid in the previous arguments of the Two Bodies (18), which is also to say that such a definition was not yet present. This lack of definition allowed for the monarch's absolute power to be read from the law as James I did when he claimed that "since all [of Parliament's] privileges were originally granted by the Crown, they were liable to be revoked by the same authority" (Figgis 140).

It is within this "transitional position" prior to 1642 that Shakespeare's *King Lear* emerges and is best understood. Lear, as a *king*, allows his conception of self to transgress the mortal limitations of the body natural into the realm of the King's immortal body and thus cannot distinguish between the perfect authority of the office of King – reified through political the-

atrics and spectacle – and his humanity, the mortal and fallible body natural that underlies and underpins the metaphysical abstractions of the body politic. *King Lear* thus dramatizes Lear's failure to grasp that the god-like authority, immortality, and faultlessness of the King's body politic are socially constructed powers bestowed by and justified through the monarch's responsibility of governing over his subjects, without which the name of King is meaningless.

Echoes of both the theory's "touch of 'Monophysitism,'" which works to elide the humanity of the sitting king, and the capacity for variable interpretation of the Two Bodies' distinct abilities can be read from Lear's divinely garbed theatrics of absolute authority in his first scene onstage and from Kent's criticism of Lear in terms of his natural body's fallibility. "Royal Lear" (1.1.140), throughout his first appearance, entirely claims the metaphysical significance attached to the King's body politic through (mostly pagan) divine rhetorical associations: he has been remembered by Kent in divine terms "[a]s my great patron...in my prayers" (1.1.143) and he frequently invokes the notably absent "gods" to bolster his pronouncements (1.1.111, 112, 161, 179). Further, he specifically calls on the "sacred radiance of the sun" (1.1.110) when disowning Cordelia, reminiscent of the Sun imagery Kantorowicz describes as the "symbol of divine majesty" used throughout *Richard II* (39). Lear's idea of himself as king thus recalls the divine authority of the body politic's mystical and metaphysical, "superhuman 'absolute perfection'" (Kantorowicz 4).

Lear inhabits this metaphysical posture even after having evacuated the meaning from the more literal interpretation of the second body as metaphor – "consisting of Policy and Government, and constituted for the Direction of the People, and the Management of the public weal" – through his giving away to Cornwall and Albany "the sway, / Revenue, execution" (1.1.137-138) of the kingdom, and thus his responsibility of governance. Indeed, Lear's belief that he still retains the metaphysics of the king's faultless body politic clearly manifests in his banishment of Kent after having relinquished practical governance of the state:

Hear me, recreant, on thine allegiance, hear me:
That thou hast sought to make us break our vows,
Which we durst never yet, and with strained pride
To come betwixt our sentences and our power,
Which nor our nature, nor our place can bear,
Our potency made good, take thy reward.

.....
This shall not be revoked.
(1.1.168-173, 180)

This demonstration of absolute authority expresses the deep ironies of Lear's division of both kingdom and kingship. Crucially, Lear has ostensibly already divested himself of the source

of his statements' power, of "the sway, / Revenue, execution" (1.1.137-138) of his kingdom and its land. Adding to this irony, Lear directly refers to his Two Bodies in the distinction "nor our nature, nor our place can bear," but resolutely and explicitly claims that Kent's banishment proves (in the royal plural no less) "Our potency" as king, thus obscuring the possibility that he is acting as a rash and fallible mortal; indeed, his "wrath" is coined in the superhuman image of a "dragon[']s]" (1.1.123). Further still, Lear rebuffs Kent as a "recreant" or "heretic" (Foakes 169) for contradicting his authority, revealing that at this point, Lear believes it is *Kent's* behavior that is "no good divinity" and prefers the orthodox responses of Goneril and Regan, which as I will show mimetically reflect Lear's desired self-image as King. In speaking so, Lear demonstrates his belief that the perfect power of his pronouncements, i.e. his absolute authority, inheres in his personal will rather than the governance of kingship and that it is perhaps the absolute authority granted through ultimate realization of the ideology of monarchy that Lear means when seeking to retain "all th'addition" to "the name" of king.

In contrast, Kent sees Lear's decision to divide the kingdom as an error made in Lear's fallible body natural, one subject to "Passions and Death as other men are" (Plowden 234), and denounces key elements of Lear's body politic in terms of his flawed, mortal body. Kent says "Lear is mad" (1.1.147), that Lear's "rashness" shows him to have "fall[en] to folly" (1.1.152, 150), and that he "dost evil" (1.1.167). Kent's accusation of course directly conflicts with discourse on the second body which, to recall Blackstone, "is not only incapable of doing wrong, but even thinking wrong...: in him is *no folly* or weakness" (qtd. in Kantorowicz 4; emphasis mine). Kent also satirizes Lear's claim to divinely sanctioned action with "Now by Apollo, King, / Thou swear'st thy gods in vain" (1.1.161-162); links himself specifically to a "physician" seeking to cure Lear's "foul disease" (1.1.164-165); and refers to him early on as "old man" (1.1.147). Kent thus attempts to dispel the illusion of Lear's absolute perfection from his transcendent body politic by criticizing Lear in terms of his humanity. That he does so with the clear goal of convincing Lear to "Reserve [his] state" (1.1.150), Lear's "safety being the motive" (1.1.158), elucidates both the deep connection between Lear's physical safety and reserving material power and Lear's naïve belief that he can maintain absolute authority even without material power over his kingdom.

Kent's dissent against Lear's division of the kingdom and his banishment, in addition to showcasing the potential for sovereignty to obscure human error through asserting divinely justified, absolute authority, also seems a near premonition of the 1642 parsing of the will of the king's person and the office of the King in the Declaration of Lords and Commons, thus dramatizing the problems of a political theology that both is subject to contrasting interpretations and is meant to consol-

idate power in the person of the king. Lear's banishment of Kent and Cordelia, the voices of reason, bears out the crux of this problem: because Lear's divinely-tinged absolutism can be supported through ambiguous definition of the king's mortal and divine natures, any opposition to this absolutism, even if legally justifiable, could potentially be simply expelled from the (actual) body politic, again calling to mind that James I was able to argue for absolute authority because, "since all [Parliament's] privileges were originally granted by the Crown, they were liable to be revoked by the same authority" (Figgis 140).

We also learn from James I the intrinsically theatrical nature of the monarch in this period, who is set "upon a public stage, in the sight of all the people" (qtd. in *Norton Shakespeare* 571), which, given his charge to his son Charles I that he love God partly because God made him "a little God to sit on his Throne, and rule over other men" (qtd. in *Norton Shakespeare* 571), reveals an intrinsic connection between claims of divinely justified absolutism and theatrical show. Particularly revealing of this connection is James I's statement to parliament that "Kings are justly called Gods, for that they exercise a *manner or resemblance* of Divine power upon earth" (qtd. in Foakes 14; emphasis mine). In its definition of "manner" as a "Customary mode of acting or behavior; habitual practice, custom, fashion," the OED cites an example from the King James Bible (OED online). James in this moment claims, then, that kings should be called Gods based primarily on the fact that their behavior resembles the abstract and empirically indefinite concept of "Divine power." This move from mortal to divine is thus entirely dependent on the monarch's appearance and "manner."

But the example of Lear's royal "manner" above and its conflicting interpretations reveals what Kantorowicz calls "[t]he difficulties of defining the effects as exercised by the body politic—active in the individual king like a *deus absconditus*—on the royal body natural" (Kantorowicz 12): the king's resemblance to divinity is itself only legible if read through a hermeneutical framework, which in the case of Lear is bifurcated into each of the distinct Two Bodies. That Lear claims his actions are ratified by both his "nature" and his "place" begs the question of which is the agent, the same question that Kent and the 1642 Declaration of Lords and Commons attempt to parse. The ultimate inscrutability of a single action issuing from a dual body, which is then interpreted through such a dual body's dichotomous legal doctrine, reveals that the "manner" that justifies absolute authority is also a site at which political performance can shape belief in the form of regal spectacle.

In his analysis of *Richard II*, Christopher Pye points to this same equivocality in his analysis of the various and opposing descriptions of what Richard's flushed cheeks symbolize, an ambiguity revealing that the monarch's presence is "strictly a matter of interpretation":

[The regal presence] is a sight that cannot be separated from the response it provokes. . . . While Richard's ghostly transformation amounts to an interpretive moment – something to be read rather than seen – his change of affect remains intensely focalized and theatrical none the less, as if inscription were somehow a *spectacularly* unmarkable event. That ambiguous crossing of sight and sign, inscription and speculation...underlies the sovereign's theatrical powers. (101, 103)

The king's single physical body is thus a glyph to be read for meaning, but of course the interpretation is limited by its context, an ideological landscape that those in power, including Lear within the play, work to shape through political stagecraft.

My argument in this essay thus ultimately aligns with Pye's as well as Stephen Greenblatt's: that political spectacle is the means by which sovereignty becomes itself, i.e. the divine and superhuman, absolute authority that James I and "Royal Lear" assert. As Stephen Greenblatt argues in *Shakespearean Negotiations*, both theatre and power ultimately depend upon the collective belief of their audience or subjects:

at some level we know perfectly well that the power of the prince is largely a collective invention, the symbolic embodiment of the desire, pleasure, and violence of thousands of subjects, the instrumental expression of complex networks of dependency and fear, the agent rather than the maker of the social will. Yet we can scarcely write of prince or poet without accepting the fiction that power directly emanates from him and that society draws upon this power. (Greenblatt 4)

Lear works to inhabit the latter "fiction" of the sovereign in an effort to maintain the ideological position of monarch. When banishing Kent, Lear flattens any gap between his "sentences" and his "power," and reveals his belief that he is the author of reality, a supreme, literal "authority" whose speech's meaning perfectly manifests material consequences without mediation. This is despite the fact that he is at this moment powerless in material terms save one hundred knights. Greenblatt's point is revealed, however, in that Lear commands Kent to hear his banishment through invoking his allegiance—"on thine allegiance, hear me" (1.1.168)—which metonymizes the relationship that constructs collective belief in the sovereign, that of subject to ruler, which in turn provides the medium for any ruler's absolute power. The extreme irony, however, stems from the fact that Lear, ensnared in a supremely deluded interpretation of kingship, fails to see that his or any ruler's power depends on his subjects' execution of his commands and their requisite collective belief in the sovereign's position as sovereign. Thus, in Kent's obedience to Lear's banishment and his willful return disguised as Caius, we see how the ideological positions of monarch and subject survive Lear's relinquishing

governance. Pye again: "[S]overeignty's ideological hold may be most complete at the moment it becomes nothing more than a stagy ghost" (101). The sovereign's theatrical power, and thus power itself, is not only "a sight that cannot be separated from the response it provokes," but also a "manner or resemblance" that gains "Divine power" in its sheer resemblance of that power to a subject.

"Lear's shadow": Theatricality as a means to "everything"

The lie of "everything" that Royal Lear believes himself to be is a kind of absolutist gestalt, metaphysically larger than the sum of the parts that compose it: absolute paternal and political authority, hints of a spatial omnipresence reminiscent of the King's body politic being "more large and ample" than the natural body (Plowden 221), and the ultimate reflexive narcissism of being both the primary spectacle and its primary spectator; to refer to this inclusive totality, I at times borrow "second or super-body" (40) from Kantorowicz, the term he uses to describe the "metaphysis" that Richard II sees lost in his reflection (see 39-40). The fulfillment of Lear's metaphysical desires is, in fact, reflected back to him and reified, not through the disillusioning mirror of *Richard II*, but through the political, theatrical, and simply social performance of allegiance and obedience. Royal Lear, while dividing his kingdom, seeks perfect mimesis of his absolute authority through staging his daughters' performance of their love, a representation meant to reify the metaphysical significance of the body politic that he simultaneously evacuates of the responsibility to govern. *King Lear* also offers, as a dark but authorized mirror to Lear's fantasy of "everything," the Fool's reflection of the "nothing" that Lear has become, which systematically exposes Lear's belief that absolute authority inheres in his person as a solipsistic delusion unfounded in the realities of kingship and disassociated from the basis of power: his subjects and material control of the kingdom. Ultimately, Shakespeare's play not only critiques Lear's grandiose self-conception, revealing his basic error to be a misinterpretation of the responsibilities of governance, but also suggests that the conditions of possibility for such misreading lie in the ideology of monarchy contemporary to the play, its concealment of the monarch's humanity, and its central contradiction of a divine mortal.

Goneril's articulation and unpacking of the hollow-ringing "everything" that Lear attempts to embody is also the clearest direct referent for Lear's use of the word in the fourth act. Though he has already "divided / In three [the] kingdom" (1.1.36-37) and initially shows no signs of deviating from this plan, Lear calls his daughters to publically perform their affection for him and thereby join absolute kingly authority to absolute paternal authority. Goneril, in doing so, indulgently totalizes Lear in the same, transcendent supremacy that Lear displays throughout the division scene:

Sir, I do love you more than word can wield the matter,
 Dearer than eyesight, space and liberty,
 Beyond what can be valued, rich or rare,
 No less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honour.
 As much as child e'er loved, or father found,
 A love that makes breath poor and speech unable,
 Beyond all manner of so much I love you.
 (1.1.55-61)

Goneril's performance reifies Lear's identity as encompassing and surpassing the limits of human perception, that which can be valued "rich or rare," and that which cannot be as easily be valued – "life, . . . grace, health, beauty, honour." By ending with "Beyond all manner of so much I love you," Goneril expresses utter deference to a Lear that transcends the spatial qualities of his physical body, extending the boundaries of his identity even beyond those of his kingdom's "space and liberty" and cascading the superhuman structure of kingship's "absolute perfection" to an all-encompassing totality: all life is Lear, but Lear is larger than life. Lear completely contains her, as the sovereign would any of his/her subjects in the form of this extra-physical body, the "body politic," which Plowden's *Reports* describes in similar spatial terms as "more ample and large" than the body natural and of which the monarch is both the "Head" and, because the bodies are joined together, the whole (Plowden 234). Regan performs similarly, aligning her happiness in Lear's combined kingly and fatherly affection: "...I am alone felicitate / In your dear highness' love" (1.1.75-76).

These reifying performances complete a circuit of self-referential and absolute narcissism through which Lear sees only himself—or rather only the part of himself he wants to see, i.e., the lie of "everything" that elides both his physical limitations and the material foundations of his abstract authority. Demonstrating Pye's description of spectacle "affirm[ing] the sovereign's might to all who looked on, including the king himself" (Pye 2), Goneril and Regan's performances reinforce only what the play reveals to be Lear's delusional, absolutist identity while consciously avoiding the remainder, i.e., his flawed, rash, and exemplary human weakness, the mortal man that Regan tellingly reveals to have perhaps always been obscure to Lear in remarking "he hath ever but slenderly known himself" (1.1.294-295). This selective self-knowledge shows that the "they" to which Lear refers in saying "they told me I was everything" may be as expansive as "everyone," extending to include not only Goneril and Regan, but all of his subjects who reify his identity in terms reminiscent of the "orthodoxy" of the King's Two Bodies. Lear's lack of self-knowledge and ultimate discovery (though of dubious permanence) of the "lie" he has believed suggest first of all that the ideology that supports absolute monarchy has at least partially dictated Lear's misreading of both his role within it and his own humanity; and, second, that the very presence of the king's human fallibility inevitably leads to misappropriation of the second body's divine perfection.

Cordelia's refusal to perform and Kent's attempt to stop Lear's political stagecraft, however, represent truthful cracks in the circuitous mirror of Lear's deluded narcissism. Foreshadowing the Fool's later "thou art nothing" (1.4.184-185), as well as the Fool's emphasis on the "natural" relationships of subject to sovereign and daughter to father, Cordelia can say "Nothing" (1.1.87) to compete for Lear's affection beyond asserting her bond to Lear as his daughter and subject. She coins her love, which she claims in an aside to be "[m]ore ponderous" (1.1.78) (or, as Foakes glosses, "more substantial") than her tongue, in terms of "duty" (1.1.102) and action, saying "since what I well intend, / I'll do't before I speak" (1.1.227-228). By emphasizing the opposition between her action-based love and her sisters' "glib and oily art" (1.1.226) of flattery, Cordelia delineates a hierarchical relationship validated by the play that values actions over words. This devaluation of words in turn emphasizes the "nothing"-ness of the "name, and all th'addition to the king" (1.1.137) without Lear's performance of *his* duty—to recall that one of the less mystical, fundamental aspects of the body politic is its being "constituted for the Direction of the People, and the Management of the public weal" (Plowden 213)—of reciprocity to his subjects through governance.

Of course, as shown above, Kent seeks to shatter the theatrical mirror reifying Lear's identity even more explicitly than Cordelia and have Lear "[r]evoke [his] gift" (1.1.165) of material power to Goneril and Regan; Kent does so, as noted, in terms that denounce essential aspects of Lear's "super-body," that link Lear to his flawed and mortal physical body, and that elucidate the deep connection between Lear's physical safety and his preserving the governing responsibilities of kingship while arguing that Lear "Reserve [his] state" (1.1.150), Lear's "safety being the motive" (1.1.158).

Regardless of Cordelia's and Kent's intentions, Lear believes their respective disruptions to be attempts at undermining his authority: he speaks of Cordelia's "pride" (1.1.130) in her refusal to perform her love for him in a speech and of Kent's "strained pride" in stepping "betwixt our sentences and our power" (1.1.171). That Lear interprets Cordelia's and Kent's dissent as "pride" (1.1.130) showcases his deep insecurity about losing authority, which he has attempted to alleviate through the love pageant. Lear banishes both Cordelia and Kent, therefore, because he is deceived into believing, through his own flattering theatrical production, that doing so is necessary to preserve that authority. Lear, then, succumbs to the same logic that he employs in attempting to retain the authority of kingship through its performance. Cordelia's apparent lack of love for Lear through her reticence in his staged love pageant results in Lear's creation of that lack of love's effect: though Lear "loved her most," his banishment of Cordelia prevents him from "set[ting] [his] rest on her kind nursery" (1.1.123-124).

By burnishing out these cracks in the political-theatrical reflection of his body politic, Lear ejects voices of political realism from the “space and liberty” of his courtly echo chamber and delays his fitful acceptance of human limitation until discovering the physicality of Poor Tom, “the thing itself” (3.4.104), as evidence of both the mortal body he empathizes with through suffering—as he realizes shortly after that he is “not ague proof”—and the failure of his own rule of society—“O, I have ta'en / Too little care of this” (3.4.32-33).

Between this muddled acknowledgement of his humanity, which can be taken to begin from Lear's last line of Act Two, Scene Two, “O fool, I shall go mad” (2.2.475) and Lear's maintained belief in a transcendent kingly body lies an extended liminal state in which the Fool performs a dark theatrical reflection of Lear's disjunction of self-conceptions. In deeply material and bodily terms, the Fool constantly mocks Lear for the surrender of his land and wealth to his daughters as well as for Lear's inversion of the natural hierarchies between father and child and sovereign and subject and attempts to show him that doing so made Lear “nothing” more than “Lear's shadow” (1.4.222).

The Fool represents Lear foolish to “give away [his] land” (1.4.137), his “living” (1.4.106), and his “crown” (1.4.153) and then links this divestment to Lear's powerlessness: “thou has mad'st thy daughters thy mothers; ... thou gav'st them the rod and put'st down thine own breeches” (1.4.163-165). The “rod” suggests the royal scepter as well as an implement of physical punishment, thus uniting the image of royal power with the punishment of Lear's exposed physical body. In response to another jest and Lear's question “Dost thou call me fool, boy?”, the Fool replies: “All thy other titles thou hast given away; that thou wast born with” (1.4.140-141). Lear's division of his kingdom is connected to the loss of “the name” of King that Lear even at this point tacitly claims as his own (1.4.77-78, 223-224); the Fool hereby attempts to enlighten Lear to the foolishness and unsustainability of possessing anything like absolute authority when he neither “keeps nor crust nor crumb” (1.4.188). The most harrowing criticism, though, is the Fool's “Now thou art an O without a figure; I am better than thou art now. I am a fool, thou art nothing” (1.4.183-185). The Fool, in the coup de grace of his reflection of Lear in negative, here paints Lear as only a zero without a number before it to give it value; Lear stripped of the material substance of his power, i.e., both his duty to govern and his control of land and wealth, thus cannot be anything more than his purportedly valueless body. Monarch he “nothing” is.

Yet Lear does nothing to silence the Fool and does not come to any realization from this onslaught of criticism. Why? Though the Fool's critique of Lear appears more outrageous than either Cordelia's or Kent's, the Fool's reflection of Lear differs from their disruptions of the political theater, and is allowed to persist, because the Fool's criticism is safely circumscribed by

a strictly defined power structure under Lear's control – “Take heed, sirrah, the whip” (1.4.108). Thus, however critical and biting the critique, the Fool's very existence as a servant-performer ultimately serves to validate Lear's authority in a similar way to Lear's production of Goneril and Regan's flattering performances. The Fool points to this inability to be taken seriously in another material critique responding to Lear's “nothing can be made of nothing”: “Prithee tell him, so much the rent of his land comes to; he will not believe a fool” (1.4.130-132). The Fool's critique is thus circumscribed by the Fool's officially sanctioned mockery. Lear's ability to dismiss the Fool's blatant criticism as “bitter” (1.4.133), as he does in response to the above, in fact grants him absolute authority over his most grievous faults and imperfections. In other words, the Fool's office serves Lear by offering up the worst of Lear's mortal body to the absolute authority of Lear's kingly “super-body” and thereby serves as an ironic support to Lear's immaculate self-conception.

The play bears out that Lear can only begin to realize the delusions of the second, “super-body” through Goneril's subsequent and simultaneous splintering of his authority's socio-theatrical affirmation and enactment of material control over the state. Goneril, who had affirmed her love for Lear as dearer than “space and liberty,” here threatens to “censure” (1.4.200) Lear's liberty for the “fault” of keeping an “all-licensed fool” (1.4.191) and an “insolent retinue” (1.4.192) whose “breaking forth / In rank” (1.4.193-4) is “not to be endured” (1.4.194). Goneril's emphasis on these disturbances of the social hierarchy implicitly subsumes Lear's authority under her own and defines his allowance of such disturbances as undermining her new authority. She claims justification for doing Lear an unspecified “offense / Which else were shame” (1.4.202-203) “in the tender of a wholesome weal” (1.4.201), which directly reflects the King's body politic being constituted for the “Management of the public weal” as outlined in Plowden. Goneril, whose theatrical performance of love had totalized Lear's authority into an equation with life itself, is now positioned to usurp and perform that previous authority over Lear.

Goneril's justification of her actions “in the tender of a wholesome weal” flies in the face of the “natural” political and filial patriarchies, at the top of which is Lear as monarch and father, and thus highlights the consequences of Lear's confused agglomeration of his claim to these respective authorities. Lear, having made as the Fool says “his daughters his mothers,” has thus violated both “natural” orders: the filial in which children are obedient to their fathers and its extension as a metaphor to naturalize the political hierarchy in which the King is the father and his subjects are his children. He has already unwittingly placed himself in the position of subject.

The contradiction of his authority from Goneril, who had performed its primary reification, and her demonstration of this inversion in threatening to discipline Lear as a subject crack

the socio-theatrical mirror affirming Lear's delusional belief that he can maintain "the name, and all th'addition to a king" without governance and thus dispels the illusion of the king's "super-body." In asking "Are you our daughter?" (1.4.209), Lear first doubts, tellingly in the royal plural, the identity of Goneril as daughter and subject, which hitherto he has supposed and she has reaffirmed to be only an extension of his own authoritative "body politic." Then, for the first time, he doubts himself:

Does any here know me? Why, this is not Lear
Does Lear walk thus, speak thus? Where are his eyes?
Either his notion weakens, or his discernings are
lethargied – Ha! Sleeping or waking? Sure 'tis not
so. Who is it that can tell me who I am?
(1.4.217-221)

These lines reveal a process of self-realization: if Goneril, an outwardly visible extension of his superhuman totalization as World-State-King, no longer reliably reflects his regal identity, then perhaps he himself no longer exhibits it. The dissonance between his physical status and his conception of himself as absolute sovereign is no longer rationally sustainable, and here marks the first instance of Lear's prolonged descent into madness.

Lear's shocked questioning of his identity has more significance than this, however: in conjunction with the Fool's harrowing answer of "Lear's shadow" (1.4.222), it exposes the necessarily theatrical construction of the king's second body. Through the significance that "shadow" has in Elizabethan English of "an actor or a play in contrast with the reality represented" (OED online), the Fool's piercing epithet captures Lear as a mere mortal player acting out the theatrical illusion of kingly "pomp" through the role of the totalized phantasm of "everything," but now without an audience to substantiate this belief. The image of Lear as delusionally performing this identity further manifests in Lear's questioning of his behavior and gestures: "Does Lear walk thus, speak thus? Where are his eyes?" Thus, his actions, to recall Pye's summation of spectacle's role in constructing the regal identity, no longer "affir[m] the sovereign's might" (Pye 2) to others or even himself. However, by still seeking validation of his identity through others – "Does any here know me?" – he affirms that the illusion of the king's "super-body" relies on both the sovereign's and the subjects' suspension of disbelief.

Thus Lear's "shadow" of absolutism demarcates the outer limits of James's "manner or resemblance of Divine power upon earth," which creates the power it performs. The monarch's movement toward "Divine power," however, is also one away from their humanity, the tension of which illuminates *King Lear's* tragedy. Despite the lie of "everything" proving to be "nothing" without an audience, Lear can never be completely outside the ideological order of monarchy; as Foakes points out, he remains

referred to as King throughout the play, even by his enemies (19)—Cornwall refers to him as such to Gloucester in "Where hast thou sent the King?" (3.7.50). Lear does not initially even desire to completely cast off kingship – only the duties that accompany it. Indeed, Lear seeks to live in the space of regal theatre and spectacle, to inhabit and embody the abstraction of "the name" of King without the burden of the "execution of the rest" (1.1.138). In other words, Lear wants to remain—and to a certain extent does remain—the figurehead of absolute authority within the ideological framework of monarchy despite simultaneously casting off the power that can justify it.

The tragedy lies in Lear's disillusionment with that authority, the indelible role of king that he cannot divest, and the inequality among the members of the body politic that he yet represents, all of which he experiences through finally seeing that which is literally outside of his body politic yet representative of his body natural: the raw physicality of "[u]naccommodated man." Indeed, Lear's tragedy resounds most harshly in that he ultimately becomes, even after his intensely human suffering, much like Pye's regal phantasm: little more than a "stagy ghost" of either the old mortal father or ruined immortal king, who "knows not what he says" (5.3.291). The productive paradox of Lear's division of himself and of the kingdom is that his attempt to excise all human imperfection from an absolute and perfect identity of "everything" through theatrical fictions is itself an indelibly human desire. The tragedy of *King Lear* is thus the tragedy of human governance writ large through the theatrical reification of a political-theological ideology in which performing the "manner or resemblance of Divine power" creates that power on the stage of the throne.

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