Royal Bodies in Shakespearean Adaptations on Screen

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**From Kantorowicz to the Windsors**

In her controversial essay “Royal Bodies” (2013), Hilary Mantel focuses on the intersection between the monarchy and bodies, and particularly the bodies of royal women. The essay, largely a critique of the current British royal family, argues that the concept of monarchy is constructed in such a way that the public tends to see royals as superior and untouchable, as something to be admired and looked at. Entitled “Royal Bodies in Shakespearean Adaptations on Screen,” this special issue considers the ways Shakespeare and adaptations of his plays on screen engage with the early modern royal body. The special issue seeks to move beyond Mantel’s limited analysis of the appearance of royal bodies by discussing the acts that these royal bodies undertake; political machinations, deception, murder, and conquest; as well as acts of love, heroism, and creation. The special issue also considers the political significance of the royal body in pre/post Brexit-Britain and the construction and consolidation of on-screen royalty through the processes of adaptation and remediation in digital media.

The articles collected in this special issue duly build upon Ernst Kantorowicz’s landmark work *The King’s Two Bodies*, which analyses the political duality that English law
attributed to kingship; a duality predicated on the idea that a monarch possessed two bodies, a body natural and a body politic (79). This meant that while the former was mortal, the latter quality was artificial, mystical, eternal, and divine: an embodiment of both the nation and the authority of sovereignty. Kantorowicz’s work remains significant as, to understand the political motivations within many of Shakespeare’s plays, one must also understand the nature of monarchical power. It is because of this that critics such as Stephen Greenblatt (Renaissance; “Introduction”) have utilized Kantorowicz’s doctrine of the king’s two bodies as the foundation for an understanding of the theatricality of power. Stephanie Elsky proposes that because Kantorowicz analyzed “the ceremonial expression of the king’s two bodies in medieval funeral processions and monuments, effigies, and coins, critics like Greenblatt were drawn to its theatrical and performative potential” (9). As David Norbrook notes, the analysis of the king’s two bodies by New Historicist critics was done in the context of work on Elizabeth I, and is often seen as the “keystone of Elizabethan theories of language and representation” (329). In Elizabeth I’s much imitated and frequently reproduced Golden Speech, her last speech to members of Parliament (delivered on 30 November 1601), for example, Elizabeth calls herself a prince, a queen, and a king. This speech highlights the importance of the idea of the king’s two bodies to the Tudor politics that inspired Shakespeare and others working on the early modern stage.

The connection between Elizabethan representation and Shakespearean studies is furthered by Elizabeth’s own reference to herself as Richard II, a reference pursued by Norbrook in his analysis of Richard II using Kantorowicz’s work. Both Richard and Elizabeth were the subject of depositions; although, of course, the Earl of Essex’s attempt to oust Elizabeth was less successful than Henry Bolingbroke’s had been (Norbrook). Reflecting on the Essex rebellion of February 1601, Elizabeth was reported as saying to William Lambarde (newly appointed keeper of the records in the Tower of London), “I am Richard II
know ye not that?” (Chambers 326–7). These were not idle musings and, seemingly, Elizabeth was not alone in noting the comparison between the monarchs. Shakespeare’s dramatization of *Richard II* was performed by the Lord Chamberlain’s Men in advance of the treacherous Essex rebellion. According to the dominant narratives, the plotters hoped to convince the audience of the need to get rid of their ruler, such that they would support the Earl of Essex when, the following day, he marched on the city. Elizabeth’s assertion “I am Richard” thus suggests not only a shared vulnerability but also an example of the idea of the king’s two bodies in practice, matching Elizabeth’s image of herself as a woman with “the heart and stomach of a king” in her Tilbury speech in July 1588. As Elisabeth Bronfen and Barbara Straumann convincingly argue, Elizabeth I is distinguished from other female monarchs by the (seemingly) “contradictory positions she brought together by gendering the symbolic body of the king and emphasising that she was a queen” (134), playing freely with her roles as warrior, virgin, mother, and lover—“unreachable for all, except as a representation” (134)—and with her status as a public figure, caught between her symbolic and natural bodies.

Shakespearean critics (and directors and performers) have also turned to the monarchs featured in Shakespeare’s plays (and the histories in particular) as examples of the simultaneously double and divided nature of the king’s body. Perhaps the greatest argument for the influence of Kantorowicz’s doctrine is that, as Peter Holland observes, it “made the comparatively rare transition from academy to theatre” (37), having strongly influenced John Barton’s 1973 stage production of *Richard II*. Barton’s production indicated the potential duality of the royal body by emphasizing Richard and Bolingbroke as reflected, opposing versions of one another. This was made manifest not only in key scenes such as 4.1 in which Richard and Bolingbroke held a broken mirror between them, but in the decision to nightly alternate Ian Richardson and Richard Pasco in the roles of Richard and Bolingbroke.
Kantorowicz’s insights perhaps also explain why there remains a cultural interest in the royal body that has not abated since Shakespeare’s time, even as the actual power of the monarchy has waned to a largely symbolic function in the United Kingdom. The popularity of series like *The Crown* (Netflix, 2016–present), as well as the tabloids’ compulsive coverage of new royals like Kate Middleton and Meghan Markle, speaks to a fascination with divining and questioning the distinctions between the “natural” and the performed; the personal and the political; the individual and the state. By focusing on the performance of royalty and the royal body in Shakespeare’s plays and subsequent adaptations thereof, this special issue both reflects on and advances Kantorowicz’s proposal into the realm of new media.

**Royal bodies in 2020 and beyond**

Writing this introduction in mid-2020, such a task is perhaps inevitably influenced by at least four significant events: “Megxit,” the decision of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, Meghan Markle and Prince Harry, to step back from their senior roles in the British royal family; the release of Hilary Mantel’s long-awaited conclusion to her trilogy about Tudor statesman Thomas Cromwell, *The Mirror and the Light* (2020); the Black Lives Matter protests, sparked by the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police and the continued and widespread police brutality targeting people of color; and the outbreak of coronavirus, more commonly referred to as the global COVID-19 outbreak. Royalty world-wide have certainly not been spared from the virus. Prince Charles, the heir apparent to the British throne, and Prince Albert of Monaco both succumbed to, but survived, the infection, and Spain’s Princess Maria Teresa was the first royal to die of the coronavirus; Kantorowicz’s conceptualization of the monarch may very well have two bodies, but one is mortal and thus subject to illness and death. But while Charles’s battle with COVID-19 may have illustrated the vulnerability of the
future King of England to illness, it wasn’t until UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson was hospitalized due to COVID-19 that connections were overtly made in the media between unwell bodies and the ill health of the states they represented. As well as extending sympathy to Johnson, media outlets drew attention to the potential effect of his illness on, variously, the stability of the Conservative party, a potential leadership power vacuum, and the government’s ability to negotiate Britain’s exit from the European Union. The connectedness of Johnson’s body and the state he governs reached its rhetorical climax in Allison Pearson’s plea in the Telegraph, “We need you, Boris—your health is the health of the nation.”

Such rhetoric has an undeniable appeal to conservative media outlets like the aforementioned Telegraph or The Sun, who marked the release of Johnson from intensive care with the headline, “Boris is out (Now that really is a Good Friday!)” (Dunn and McDermott). The Sun faced opposition for its celebratory tone, given the Prime Minister’s good health coincided with what was then the highest day of COVID-19 casualties in the UK (Shabi; “Sun Faces Huge Online Backlash”). Less commented on, however, was the headline’s audacious equivalence of Johnson’s recovery with the resurrection of Jesus Christ over Easter and the suggestion that there was, perhaps, a similarly sacrificial quality to his illness. While this configuration of Johnson, rather than Charles, as the embodiment of the body politic marks a distinction from the form of government imagined by Kantorowicz, it nevertheless possesses what Matthew Sweet describes as an “Elizabethan weight of symbolism” (@MatthewSweet).

Our continued ability to recognize the symbolic potential of the king’s two bodies can be seen in Hilary Mantel’s The Mirror and the Light:

The poor labourer owns his sleep and his stool, and can sell his piss to the Fuller, whereas the king’s piss and stool is the property of all England, and every fantasy that
disturbs his night hours is recorded somewhere in a book of dreams, which is written
in the clouds massing over the fields and forests of his realm: every stir of lust, every
frightful waking. Should he be costive, he is ordered a potion; should his bowel be
loose, its product is taken away in a bowl under an embroidered cloth. They can only
judge what is within him, by what comes out: a pity he is not made of glass. (334–5)

In this passage, Mantel’s Cromwell reflects on the apparatus that ensures King Henry VIII’s
body is beholden to the state he rules over. But rather than the more elegant metaphor of the
hollow crown “that rounds the mortal temples of a king” (Richard II, 3.2.161) evoked by
Richard II, or Henry IV’s longing for the “partial sleep” of a “wet sea-boy in an hour so rude”
(Henry IV Part Two, 3.1.26–7), Henry’s curious state of subjection is rendered through the
bathetic image of his doctors shifting through and recording “his piss and stool.” It would be
easier, Cromwell reflects, if Henry was made of glass because once he leaves the private
bounds of his chambers, “his natural world unites to his body politic: [. . . a]s rebels run free
in the north, and members break faith with the head, a kind of mutiny or civil war has broken
out in the king’s body” (335). Cromwell hopes that if the body of the King, at least, can be
mastered, the state may follow.

For Mantel, the royal body is thus the site over which a series of intersecting pitched
battles over religion, gender, nationality, and race range; conflicts writ into the very flesh of
the monarch that await decryption. But as both Mantel and her most famous character lament,
royal flesh is not glass: “In looking at royalty, we are always looking at what is archaic, what
is mysterious by its nature and my feeling is that it will only ever half-reveal itself.” Royalty,
the author continues, “are persons but they are supra-personal” ("Royal Bodies"). Our desire
to recover the other, concealed halves of the royal body continues unabated, nevertheless, and
this effort often reveals more about the society doing the viewing than it does the subject of
our scrutiny. Indeed, while contemporary monarchs are usually devoid of political power, media discourse can use them to shore up conservative beliefs or ideologies. A recent article in the New York Times, for instance, argues that “Megxit is the New Brexit,” with Mark Lander making a connection between the bodies of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, now divorced from their royal roles and titles, and the unease that remains in the UK post-Brexit:

With the storms over Brexit temporarily calmed by Mr. Johnson’s victory, but the underlying economic and social issues far from resolved, the royals have become a convenient proxy, allowing people to argue about race, class, gender and British identity, through the travails of a single star-crossed couple. (“Megxit”)

Lander’s argument demonstrates the interpretive potential of the royal body, summoned in this case to highlight the shared symbolism of the Sussexes’ retreat from their public roles and the intended retreat from Europe that Brexit represents. The Sussexes have certainly become a “proxy” not only for the public to discuss what constitutes Britishness, but for the media to continue the kind of discourse that fueled the referendum and the eventual “Leave” decision. What is imagined by right-wing commentators and supporters of “Leave” as an effort to restore sovereignty from European bureaucracy in the case of Brexit is, however, in the case of Megxit, a desire for individual and familial autonomy outside of the British monarchy and its intrusive reportage by the media. Since their marriage, the couple’s pushback against the idea of public ownership has been explicit. Markle filed claims against the Mail on Sunday and Mail Online when they published extracts of a letter sent to her estranged father, Thomas Markle, in 2018 and Prince Harry released a frank statement in support of his wife—itself an indication of the unusual quality of the royal couple. In it, Harry states his deep distress that the tabloids have set about in “an intentionally destructive
manner” to manipulate reports of Markle and further a “divisive agenda.” Harry reflects that the press’s behavior “destroys people and destroys lives” before observing that he “lost his mother [Princess Diana] and now […] watches his] wife falling victim to the same powerful forces” (“Statement”).

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that when the Sussexes have had the opportunity for control, they have taken it. This was seen particularly in the case of the birth of their son Archie, which broke with royal protocol. The couple kept the details of Archie’s delayed birth a secret from the public, only announcing it hours later via their “Sussex Royal” Instagram account. Furthermore, they also controversially broke with royal tradition and did not present their son to the media on the steps of the hospital hours after he was born. The first photo of Archie was instead taken by hand-picked media representatives in a photo call in Windsor two days after his birth. In the aftermath of Megxit, these overtures can be read as the first effort on the couple’s part to retrieve control of their royal bodies from the monarchy and the media. It is indeed significant that the Sussexes’ first major diversion from royal protocol came at a point of generation that should affirm Markle’s maintenance of both the royal body natural – her capacity to bear and birth royal progeny—and the body politic—Archie is currently seventh in the line of succession.

Even if they purposed to remove themselves from the institution, the control the Sussexes exert over their bodies nonetheless relies upon fairly typical royal mechanisms and an understanding of how the royal body can occupy public space. Prince Charles, for instance, posted an intimate photo of his performance as Macbeth in what is likely a school production as part of #ShareYourShakespeare, an online celebration of Shakespeare leading up his birthday celebrations. In the candid photo, posted to the official Clarence House Twitter account, a seventeen-year-old Charles, complete with resplendent fake beard, gazes ominously at a prop knife. In the photo Charles is poised “precariously between appearing
ordinary (accessible) and extraordinary (royalty)” (Lury 227); a royal body inhabiting a royal Shakespearean body, performing not only for an unseen audience, but for the wider public in his role as heir to the British throne. Karen Lury highlights “the careful choreography” (229) involved in negotiating between royal bodies and the wider public, as can be seen in both the photo call introducing Archie to the public and the posting of a photo of a teenage Prince Charles. During each instance there is an obvious tension between the body politic and the body natural, and there is also an attempt to strike a balance in representing the royal body as both ordinary and extraordinary.

What is clear from these examples, however, is that once “the clumsiness and artificiality of this formal choreography” (Lury 231) is exposed, not all royal bodies are afforded the right to be choreographed without criticism. Hilary Mantel draws attention to this perceived artificiality of the royal body in her harsh criticism of Kate Middleton, who she describes as an overchoreographed “shop-window mannequin” with a “perfect plastic smile and the spindles of her limbs hand-turned and gloss-varnished.” (“Royal Bodies”). Kate’s sister-in-law Meghan Markle is also worth pausing on because, as we have already indicated, her treatment by the press demonstrates a particularly pernicious form of racism that conveniently exorcises Britain’s often brutal and sublimated history of migration (both forced and voluntary), conquest, and exploitation.5 Her treatment, Brexit, and, even more recently, the backlash against the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, indicate a willful dismissal of any narratives which complicate a picture of (white) British greatness. Individuals like Markle, who are part of the monarchy by marriage and who by their entrance into a British institution signal the diversity of contemporary British identity, thereby present a kind of ideological sticking point. As Raka Shome argues, white femininity functions as an “ideological construction” to naturalize a patriarchal, colonial social order. White women exist as markers of beauty and motherhood, “translators (and hence preservers) of bloodlines,” and as
“symbols of national unity”: “White femininity constitutes the locus through which borders of race, gender, sexuality, and nationality are guarded and secured” (Shome 323). But Markle poses a challenge to the maintenance of this order because she represents precisely the Otherness Shome imagines white femininity defined and “guarded” against; she is an outspoken feminist, financially independent, and not only an American, but a woman of color within an institution that is historically misogynist and racist.

This tension has been revealed chiefly through constant and unflattering comparisons in the press with her white sister-in-law, Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge (known popularly as Kate Middleton). Thus, while both Markle and Middleton perform types of femininity that are conventional by any other standard (thin, cis-gendered, conservatively made-up and attired), Middleton’s difference to the royal family—her middle-classness—has been absorbed into the royal apparatus in a way that Markle’s—her race—has not. Further scrutiny of the female royal body intersects with its generative ability which, as Jo Merrey writes in this special issue, grants it power as the basis by which the royal institution perpetuates itself, but becomes in turn a site of patriarchal anxieties. The hostility to the idea of Markle as not only a non-white royal body in her own right but as the bearer of future royal bodies can be seen, for instance, in the aggressive questioning of Markle’s habit of cradling her pregnant belly during public events in 2019. Virulent responses to photographs of the Duchess on social media prompted Kensington Palace to reissue guidelines promoting “kindness and courtesy” and forbidding discriminatory material among users of the various Royal family channels. Individual and relatively anonymous comments aside, this hostility towards Markle—one instance of many—was legitimized by think-pieces in the mainstream media. One article for the Mail on Sunday, for example, attempted to explain why Markle held her belly so frequently by providing the opinion of so-called “experts” (Mail on Sunday Reporter). The headline’s suggested motives of “pride, vanity, acting—or a new age bonding
technique” indicated the article’s perspective, however. Alongside fairly unsurprising and uncontroversial comments about the importance of mothers bonding with their babies or Markle’s unconscious need to protect her child, criticism by Jo Elvin, editor of the Mail on Sunday’s magazine, You, was widely circulated. Elvin shares the assessment that the “Duchess of Showbiz’s” poses—all of which were taken at press events—were “contrived and relentlessly photo-op ready”; a willfully naïve statement from the editor of a tabloid newspaper magazine. She also expresses her belief that Markle’s tactility spoke of an unnatural attachment, observing ghoulishly that she hoped a second royal progeny “isn’t far behind” because Markle’s child is “clearly in for a smothering.” A similarly coded response from Liz Jones, Mail on Sunday columnist, imagines the Duchess’s touches like “those signs in the back of cars: Baby on Board. Virtue signalling, as though the rest of us barren harridans deserve to burn alive in our cars.” The racial implications behind the use of the word “smothering,” and the imagery it conjures, offers comparison with Shakespeare’s Othello. Othello and Markle are consistently coded as Other because of their race and overtly treated as outsiders. Both are also part of an interracial couple which is not/has not been openly accepted by the exclusive worlds they attempt to inhabit. The mention of smothering then conjures the unsettling end of the play as Othello suffocates his wife, Desdemona. Emma Smith argues that the smothering of Desdemona transforms her from active to passive: “She goes from being a person to being a prop” (220). An equally sinister meaning is implied in Elvin’s writing; Archie is simply a prop to be used in Markle’s alleged plot to further her “brand” and her career, Elvin seems to suggest.

That the press’s treatment of Markle is inherently racialized can be seen by comparing the above representative examples with the press’s depiction of Middleton’s body. Even before her pregnancies, Middleton was scrutinized for the thinness of her body. As Jemima Repo and Riina Yrjölä observe, this scrutiny is by turns concerned (“‘alarmingly thin’ (The
Daily Mail, 9 March 2011)” Repo and Yrjölä 750) and admiring. Nevertheless, in both cases, her body becomes a signifier for her “skilful self-mastery” (Repo and Yrjölä 751). The thinness of her pregnant body (Middleton suffered from hyperemesis gravidarum, an extreme form of morning sickness throughout her pregnancy) can be directly contrasted with the perceived aggressive abundance of Markle’s body which, according to the articles above, not only displays its fecundity iconically but indexically through “virtue signalling” acts of cradling. The imbalance between the body natural and body politic in Markle’s case, which leads to claims of inauthenticity, again emphasizes how only certain bodies are afforded the right to be choreographed without criticism. For example, Karen Lury’s analysis of Elizabeth II’s royal body suggests a certain amount of artificiality is expected—indeed, permitted—in her role as queen. With an emphasis on her conservative dress (when she is not costumed for an event) and stoic poise, Lury argues that her “uniqueness and her institutional status” is signaled “through her posture and behaviour, which manifest as ‘dignity’” (228).

In this way, the opposing characterization of Middleton and Markle is used to reinforce ideological norms. The women are respectively valorized and criticized for their (in)ability to meet the standards applied to white femininity. This is a competition that has been rigged from the start, however, because Markle is implicitly barred from obtaining the desired white, royal femininity by dint of her birth to a white father and black mother. Varaidzo notes that being mixed-race implies a theoretical state of racelessness. Like Markle, though, Varaidzo’s experience of living as a mixed-race woman in Britain speaks to the contrary:

My race was distinct and visible, the thing that defined me as different to the rest of my classmates. Mixedness alone couldn't describe that this difference. Blackness was
something more convincing, more tangible. [...] The world saw blackness in me before it saw anything else and operated around me with blackness in mind (12).

As Nikesh Shukla writes, “for people of colour, race is in everything we do” (“Editor’s Note”). Markle is thus doomed to failure. Middleton’s self-control is understood as a worthy—if sometimes worrying—pursuit in the service of feminine ideals. She is ultimately “docile, sweet or agreeable” (Eddo-Lodge 185). But the same self-possession becomes in Markle proprietorial, showy, and aggressive. Repo and Yrjölä argue persuasively for the importance of self-control to postfeminist and neoliberal ideas of self-realization, mobility, and happiness; Markle’s case reveals how classed and raced these concepts are.

**Contents**

This special issue of *Shakespeare Bulletin* offers a range of interdisciplinary approaches that seek to answer and illuminate the central issue of the representation of royalty and the royal body in screen adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays. Central to this special issue are adaptations on screen. Our decision to focus solely on adaptations on screen was influenced by the “continuing role of royal representation in film and television as patriotic signifier and entertainment commodity.” (Merck 1). Morra highlights the “continuous centrality of the monarchy to contemporary displays of national identity, history and community” (309). From annual Christmas broadcasts to royal documentaries, filmed pageants to royal tours, screen has been fundamentally central in how royalty is embodied and displayed in the New Elizabethan age. As Merck observes, “[m]oving images of the British monarchy, in fact and fiction, are almost as old as the moving image itself” (3). From the early days of the motion picture to appearing on internet video chats and streaming messages online to the wider
public, the history of screen and royal bodies are intertwined. Indeed, the COVID-19 outbreak of 2020 has led to in-person events attended by royalty being replaced by virtual equivalents, so that the royal body is now screened in multiple senses of the word (Allaire). On a fundamental level, it is a passive “thing that existed only to be looked at” (Mantel, “Royal Bodies”), displayed for the wider public in a carefully orchestrated ways that emphasize the duality of the royal body as both political and personal. Morra argues that Shakespeare adds “cultural depth and meaning to the absurdity of the monarchy” (308), and so this is foregrounded in adaptations of Shakespeare on screen.

In the most direct interpretation of this aim, several essays focus on the mediation of Shakespeare’s plays via film and television. The issue opens with Jo Merrey’s reflection on the depiction of female royalty in three recent film adaptations of the *Hamlet* story. Merrey expands upon our opening thoughts about the gendering of royal bodies by reading these heavily cut adaptations of Shakespeare’s play through their contrasting depictions of Gertrude as a corrupted mother and wife and an imperiled, notionally fecund Ophelia, and argues for the precarity of both female characters’ position in the court.

Deepening this focus on the cinematic royal body is Peter Kirwan’s article on the construction of the royal body within filmic space. Kirwan proposes that films of *Macbeth* and *King Lear* render the royal body in a state of unnatural stillness, held in a state of often abject relation to the actions of the landscape that surrounds them. The physical state of the royal body and its imbuenment with dramatic meaning is also a topic of discussion for Victoria Bladen. Bladen’s article posits that *King Lear* is a play preoccupied with charting the boundaries of the royal body. She argues that this fascination is more readily translated into television than film versions of the play, however. In contrast to Kirwan’s emphasis on the affordances of cinema for depicting the royal body within landscapes, Bladen thus focuses on the intimacy of her chosen medium, as well as its restrictions, in order to discuss how the
aesthetic and framing choices of adaptations often tap into key themes of the play. Sally Barnden’s article, by contrast, turns the issue’s attention to the reception conditions of Shakespearean film and rather than the remediation of Shakespeare onto film, focuses on the mediation of film itself. Drawing directly on the fruits of the “Shakespeare in the Royal Collections” project, Barnden provides an account of the screening of Laurence Olivier’s Henry V held for the British royal family in the Waterloo Chamber at Windsor Castle in 1944. In doing so, Barnden reads Henry V against not only the wartime context of the screening and George VI’s wartime popularity but the architectural and artistic space of the Waterloo chamber itself and the historic victory of George IV which it commemorates.

A final strand to the special issue combines the different disciplinary approaches of previous articles and applies them to the character of Richard III. He is a figure who loomed large in the second decade of the twenty-first century, continuing to occupy both the cultural imaginary as Shakespeare’s bottled spider but, more unusually, also the news cycle when the “car park king” was discovered. Andrea Peghinelli seeks to interrogate the complicated meanings of Richard’s body on stage, and takes as her main example Thomas Ostermeier’s stage production along with its 2015 television broadcast for ARTE France. Peghinelli discusses the performance of Richard’s disability in the production and, in particular the virtuosic exposure of the artificial hunchback during the wooing scene, in an article that comments, most relevantly, on our unabated compulsion to view, and to expose, the royal body. The last of the special issue’s articles on Richard then moves the reader beyond Europe as Marina Gerzic assesses Richard as a divisive political symbol that can be applied not only to Brexit Britain but also to Australia, as was seen during the 2015 leadership crisis in the Liberal Party. Utilizing Rupert Goold’s 2016 stage production of Richard III, broadcast to cinemas worldwide, Gerzic proposes that producers—like Shakespeare—can turn to the “historical” past in order to highlight failings in present political history. 8
The six articles included in this special issue model modes and ideologies of examining the royal body. The combined purpose of the issue is to thereby expose and problematize a continued fascination with the monarchy in ways that will be of use to future scholars. This attentiveness is required because, to return to Mantel once more, the royal body’s very existence as a thing to be looked demands an on-screen legibility that does not—and cannot—occur neutrally. The inevitably complicated and composite nature of the royal bodies that appear on screen, and which are analyzed in this issue, instead journey towards their representational meaning via intersecting processes of performance, adaptation and remediation. UK Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden’s recent concern that historical drama *The Crown* should begin with a reminder of its fictional status is proof of this point (BBC News Reporter). While in many ways the series’ focus on its royal subjects is highly sympathetic and even nostalgic, it is clearly too political a representation to be apparently taken at face value for either the conservative Dowden or *The Mail*, who have backed his call (Shawcross). That the series is no more or less fabricated than Shakespeare’s own history plays illustrates some fundamental qualities to the adaptation of the royal body on screen: its ability to trouble boundaries of history and fiction; past and present; looking and looked at.

**Works cited**

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@MsPackyetti. “The polarity is precisely the issue. The difference in treatment between Meghan and Kate is one of the clearest examples of the misogynoir at play & is a reminder that if they can do that to a Duchess, it’s happening to Black women *everyday* #OprahMeghanHarry #BlackWomenAtWork.” Twitter, 8 March 2021, 9:22 a.m.,
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**Notes**

1 Norbrook argues that Mary Axton “developed Kantorowicz’s research a great deal further and established the theory's emergence in debates over the succession to Queen Elizabeth” (343). For more, see Axton.

2 The preface of the 1642 reprinting of the speech also refers to Elizabeth as princess, adding a fourth term.

3 The term “Megxit” is a portmanteau of the name “Meghan” and the word “exit,” and a play on the word Brexit (itself a portmanteau of the words “Britain” and “exit.” Tabloids such as *The Sun* and the *Daily Mail* popularized this term in earnest in early 2020, and by January 9 more reputable news sources such as *The Guardian* began to also use “Megxit” (Roy). The
term implies that Meghan is the driving force behind the split with the Royal Family, and emerged from the ongoing hostile sexist and racist treatment against Meghan by the British tabloids. Its use is obviously intended by tabloids to incite its readership and has links to the abusive and racist trolling of Meghan online, where the term is believed to have originated. For more on the origins of the term, see Mee 2019.

4 Ben Pitcher posits that Britain’s vote to leave Europe was in “significant part due to the successful mobilization of anti-immigrant racism by the anti-establishment right.” The racist discourse that so much of the media proliferated in its reporting of the Brexit campaign has been observed as a root cause of the murder in June 2016 of pro-Remain British MP, Jo Cox, by the white supremacist Thomas Mair. Just hours before the murder, UKIP had unveiled its infamous and highly criticized “breaking point” anti-immigration poster, which was subsequently reported to police with a complaint that it incited racial hatred and breached UK race laws. Ian Cobain, Nazi Parveen, and Matthey Taylor write that the seed of hatred that drove Mair, a man already fascinated by the far right and by fascist ideology, to murder, “germinated during the febrile countdown to the EU referendum.”

5 On 31 August 1997, Harry’s mother, Princess Diana, was killed after her car crashed in a road tunnel in Paris. Although there was no evidence that paparazzi were near the vehicle when it crashed, and there were other factors including the driver's negligence that caused the collision, it was widely reported that the Princess’s car had been chased into the tunnel by press photographers riding motorcycles. Her death thus became an awful symbol of her life which had been equally hounded by the tabloids; indeed, her brother commented that the tabloids and paparazzi had “blood on their hands” (Gannett News Service).

6 We refer here to the term “misogynoir”, coined by Black feminist scholar Moya Bailey (2010), which describes misogyny that is directed towards black women, where gender and
race both play roles in bias. On the complicated history of the term misogynoir, see Bailey and Trudy (2018).

Brittany Packnett Cunningham, reflects on Meghan Markle’s discussion of the racism she faces (both from the tabloids and from within the Royal Family itself) in her and Prince Harry’s interview with Oprah Winfrey (televised in March 2021), noting the part misogynoir plays in how Markle has been treated. (@MsPackyetti).

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