

## CHAPTER SIX

### “ALMOST WITH RAVISHED LISTENING”: A MOST RARE SPEAKER IN *KING HENRY VIII* (*ALL IS TRUE*)

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Edward Stafford, the third duke of Buckingham, was condemned for high treason and executed on 17 May 1521, despite protestations of his innocence throughout his trial and after his indictment.<sup>1</sup> Transplanted from Holinshed's *Chronicles* into Shakespeare and Fletcher's *All Is True*,<sup>2</sup> the fictional duke argues his innocence at greater length and with more ferocity than his historical counterpart. In departing from their source material, the playwrights have created a literary character distinct from the historical figure on whom he was based. The trial and death sentence mark his transition from a well-regarded noble—"bounteous Buckingham, / The mirror of all courtesy" (2.1.52-53)—to a disgraced man, the removal of his title and property signaling the erasure of his aristocratic identity. To the end, Buckingham insists upon his innocence. On the verge of being "[a]bsolved . . . with an axe" (3.2.264) and thus transported to the next world, the truth or falsity of the duke's alleged treason cannot be established beyond doubt, yet he is determined to leave his audience with a final impression of himself as a man grievously wronged. The playwrights achieve this ultimately through Buckingham's scaffold speech, an eloquent and increasingly passionate address to the crowd, which threatens to burst the confines of the conventional traitor's dying speech.

Is the duke innocent, as he maintains, or is he a dissembling traitor, who uses his gift with words to conceal his treasonous nature? Buckingham's downfall is part of the play's wider concern with issues of truth and shifting historical perspectives. *All Is True* returns to the origins of the English Reformation, to Henry's marriage to Anne Boleyn, the resultant split with Rome, and the establishment of the Church of England.

Gordon McMullan suggests that the play engages with the progress of the English Reformation, presenting history as “the product of testimony that is by its very nature varied, contradictory and irresolvable” (2000, 6-7). Katherine Eisaman Maus points out that between the early 1530s and Elizabeth’s accession to the throne in 1558, the national religion in England changed four times; the consequence of these rapid changes and associated strictures was to draw attention to “the strategic difference between thought and utterance, secret conviction and external manifestation” (1995, 16-19). Although Maus’s focus is heresy, the essential point is that, from the 1530s, the growing sense of divergence between an internal consciousness and an external self became “unusually urgent and consequential for a very large number of people”, regardless of their religion (13). The crimes of heresy and treason overlap, for—as will be demonstrated in this chapter—Buckingham consciously employs the vocabulary of martyrdom in his scaffold speech.

Prior to focusing on the play, however, I shall first consider the views of historians on the circumstances surrounding the historical duke’s trial and sentencing. Barbara J. Harris writes that, toward the end of 1520, Stafford was known to be critical both of Cardinal Wolsey and of “aspects of Tudor foreign policy”, and was seemingly unaware that his criticisms of Wolsey were tantamount to dangerous attacks on Henry VIII’s own policies (1986, 178). At the same time, however, Stafford was concerned that there were those in his household who were “fomenting trouble” between himself and the king. His suspicions were confirmed when, in September of the same year, he requested permission for an armed guard to escort him on a visit to his Welsh lordships, and discovered that the king already knew of the matter (180). According to Carole Rawcliffe, the request alarmed Henry, for it seemed a sinister echo of Stafford’s father’s plan to lead a rebellion from Wales in 1483 (1978, 42).

In November 1520, Stafford was disgraced for illegally retaining Sir William Bulmer, a knight of the body (Rawcliffe, 40). In April 1521 the duke was summoned to Greenwich, refused admission to Wolsey at Westminster, then arrested on the way to London and imprisoned in the Tower. He was charged with having imagined and compassed the death of the king, and the evidence produced against him took the form of “words spoken and acts committed” between March 1511 and November 1520 (Harris 1986, 182). According to Holinshed, the duke’s indictment for treason stated that he intended to “exalt himselfe, and to vsurpe the crowne, the roiall power, and dignitie of the realme of England, and to depriue the kings maiestie thereof, that he the said duke might take vpon him the same” (Holinshed 1965, 658). Rawcliffe argues that by virtue of

his ancestry, Stafford was a real contender for the throne in the event of Henry's death without an heir (1978, 42). In the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, C.S.L. Davies writes that the duke "certainly expected to be the leading figure in the realm if Henry should die", but he also points out that a "claim to regency could easily be misrepresented as a design on the throne. . . . Neither the evidence nor the indictment suggests any formed design on the throne, only speculation on what might happen if Henry should die childless" (2004).

By the time proceedings began against him, Stafford was already considered guilty, although the charges against him appear to have been based upon "distorted and exaggerated reports of his conversations" (Rawcliffe 1978, 43). Evidence was brought against Stafford by Charles Knevet, a "former official" who had been dismissed by the duke, Stafford's chancellor, Robert Gilbert, his chaplain, John Dellacourt, and his priest and confessor, Nicholas Hopkins (Harris 1986, 188). Ambiguity surrounds Stafford even in the chronicle account. Holinshed believed that the duke was deliberately set up by Wolsey, but he was also convinced of the duke's guilt: "Alas that euer the grace of truth was withdrawne from so noble a man, that he was not to his king in allegiance as he ought to have béene! Such is the end of ambition, the end of false prophesies, the end of euill life, and euill counsell" (1965, 662).<sup>3</sup>

The opinions of historians are divided. Rawcliffe maintains that there is no real evidence that Wolsey had framed Stafford; rather, the duke was executed chiefly because Henry perceived him as a genuine threat (1978, 41-44). Mortimer Levine contends that, even if the allegations against the duke were true, all that could be proved against him was that he was "careless and/or foolish in speaking and listening" (1972, 42). According to Davies, Stafford's treason consisted of "ill-judged remarks about present politics" and "speculation about the future", but he spoke only vaguely of rebellion. The duke further endangered himself by failing to control his temper, and he may have been prone to depression (Davies 2004). In Lacey Baldwin Smith's view, Stafford was one of a number of Tudor nobles whose actions were "hysterical and self-destructive", and for whom the "verdict of history has been 'of unsound mind'" (2006, 30-31).

Harris, however, contends that many of the arguments that seek to exonerate the duke are "anachronistic", for they apply to trial legal standards that evolved only after the Tudor period (1986, 193). Unprecedented changes were made to existing treason laws during Henry VIII's reign, prompted largely by issues pertaining to his marriage to Anne Boleyn.<sup>4</sup> John Bellamy points out that it was already a treasonous offence to "compass or imagine the death of the king" (1979, 9), but in the treason

act passed in 1534, thirteen years after Stafford's execution, spoken words officially became a form of treason (31). He argues that traitorous words were at the centre of the 1534 act: "To wish or attempt bodily harm to the king, queen or the royal heir or to try to deprive the king of his title by malicious deeds, writings, and spoken words, was now laid down as treason, as was pronouncing the king a heretic, schismatic, tyrant, infidel or usurper of the crown" (31). G.R. Elton observes that although treason by words could be difficult to establish, under such law "a good deal of essentially harmless talk could be dangerous" (1972, 304). As Karen Cunningham points out, if the private realm of thought could be considered treasonous, then the crime of treason became a "function of imagination" (2002, 11); evidence gathered for the courtroom was therefore likely to be intangible and inconclusive, particularly if the accused claimed to be innocent. In such circumstances, the treason trial focused on "exposing the hidden intent of the accused"; it was obliged to "reveal a hidden self . . . both different from the observable self and against the law" (11-12). The verdict depended upon what the accused said about himself and—more importantly, in Stafford's case—what was imputed to him by others.

Bellamy reports that the duke "seems to have argued at one stage in his trial that no overt act of treason was charged against him" (1979, 151). The peers in Stafford's jury, writes Barbara Kreps, were "perplexed about how to act on evidence that was both reported and written but that did not point to an active plot against the king's life, and they asked Chief Justice Fineux for legal advice on the difference between felony and treason" (1999, 173). Fineux responded that there was a "clear difference" between the two: "there could be no felony without some act done, but merely to intend the king's death was high treason and such intention was sufficiently proven by words alone" (Bellamy 1979, 32). Mortimer Levine suggests that Fineux's response relieved the duke's peers of "any legal qualms they might have had about sending him to his death" (1972, 42).

In *All Is True*, both the interpretation of "treasonous" utterances and verbal testimony are of crucial importance in determining Buckingham's fate, whilst the portrayal of the duke is ambiguous enough to prompt a wide range of critical responses to his conduct and personal motives. Pierre Sahel maintains that he is "overthrown by guile" (1985, 149), whereas Maurice Hunt argues that the duke is "venom-mouthed" and "has been fatally poisoned by his own tongue" (1994, 230). At the opposite extreme, Rick Bowers holds that Buckingham "makes his exit as a defiant martyr"; he is "a sympathetic character throughout who has been unjustly condemned" (1986, 12). Susannah Brietz Monta points out Buckingham's

links with martyrology, but acknowledges that the “conflicting testimony—traitor or victim, liar or martyr—is never clearly resolved” (2000, 277). Dennis Kezar believes that the play “leaves in radical doubt the accusations of conspiracy and treason”, while Buckingham is “left to declare the law a ‘noble’ but fatally empty form” (2002, 21). Lee Bliss regards Buckingham as an “ambiguous” figure, who encourages rather than resolves our doubts (1975, 4), while Kreps sees his fate as part of the larger context of history: “though the past is commonly considered a known or knowable fact, the play reveals again and again that the past is unsure, subject to different interpretations, and holds unknowable secrets” (1999, 167). Kreps regards Buckingham’s case as the “only instance in any of the history plays in which conspiracy and the guilt of treason are left in doubt” (176).

In the play’s first act, Buckingham openly criticises Cardinal Wolsey, and initially expresses the intention to speak out against Wolsey before the king (1.1.136-39). Norfolk strenuously advises against this, and repeatedly warns Buckingham against indulging his “choler” toward Wolsey: “Be advised: / Heat not a furnace for your foe so hot / That it do singe yourself” (1.1.130, 139-49). Their conversation is brought to an end with the appearance of the guarded Brandon, who has come to arrest Buckingham and escort him to the Tower. The duke laments, “It will help me nothing / To plead mine innocence, for that dye is on me / Which makes my whitest part black” (207-209).

In the play, Buckingham is condemned primarily through the verbal testimony of the duke’s disaffected surveyor, based upon the historical figure of Charles Knevet (McMullan 2000, 205). When he is arrested, Buckingham declares his surveyor “false”, claiming that the “o’er-great Cardinal / Hath showed him gold” (1.1.222-23), but, as McMullan points out in a footnote, this appears to be a deliberate ambiguity, for it is “unclear whether Buckingham means that the surveyor is lying or that he has betrayed him” (2000, 230). The surveyor reports that the duke believed in a “vain prophecy” that he would become king in the event that Henry died without issue; he was apparently told this by his confessor, Nicholas Hopkins, who made the duke’s chaplain, John de la Court, swear that that he would repeat the secrets of the confessional to nobody but the duke himself (1.2.147-71). Moreover, the surveyor claims that Buckingham said that, “had the King in his last sickness failed, / The Cardinal’s and Sir Thomas Lovell’s heads / Should have gone off” (184-86), and

"If", quoth he, "I for this had been committed"—  
 As to the Tower, I thought—"I would have played  
 The part my father meant to act upon  
 Th'usurper Richard who, being at Salisbury,  
 Made suit to come in's presence; which if granted,  
 As he made semblance of his duty would  
 Have put his knife into him." (193-99)

The surveyor then imitates an action supposedly made by the duke, whereby he handled his dagger with malicious intent (203-209). This action, accompanied by a "horrible oath" (205), is, as Anston Bosman points out, "neither a verbatim quotation nor a written document", yet it constitutes the "decisive proof" in the play of the duke's intended regicide (1999, 466).

Although this testimony can be neither proved nor disproved, King Henry does not for a moment question the validity of the claim, despite Queen Katherine's haste to point out that the surveyor lost his office "On the complaint o'th'tenants", and her admonition to him to "charge not in your spleen a noble person / And spoil your nobler soul" (1.2.173-75). Those who have been captivated by the surveyor's imaginative "evidence" have, in effect, recreated in their own minds a "truth" which has no real foundation. In this sense, the "truth claims of the surveyor are also those of the theater" (Bosman 1999, 466), for this performance within the larger performance of the play itself functions as a double reminder that the surveyor is playing an interpreted role. If the mimetic performance of treason functions so effectively to persuade its audience, how is one to distinguish that performance from genuine treason? And if the simulation of treason is so utterly convincing, then is it not possible that the original instance may have been interpreted incorrectly, with no malice intended on the part of the speaker?

Representation of the trial does not feature in the play, and doubts are fostered by the reliance on the single, verbal testimony of the surveyor. As McMullan states, the audience hears "second-hand narratives" (2000, 101), or what Sahel describes as "defamatory arabesques" (1985, 149). Bosman emphasises the use of confession as an "*auditory* system of interrogation and prescription", following "a chain of voices running from Hopkins . . . to the king" (1999, 463). Repeated transmission of information increases the likelihood of distortion, so that the corruption of "truth" becomes inevitable as justice summons "witnesses of witnesses" (Sahel 1985, 149).

Like the surveyor's verbal testimony, Buckingham's scaffold speech is also problematic. In the face of the duke's insistence that he is innocent,

the spectator must scrutinise and interpret his words and conduct on the scaffold in much the same way that the evidence against Stafford was assessed at his trial. Following his trial and condemnation, the duke can summon only words to his advantage, and he does so through the medium of the scaffold speech. Before examining Buckingham's words more closely, however, it is helpful to understand the historical context in which such speeches occurred.

In the early modern era, the traitor was perceived as a threat to the monarch and, by extension, to the whole realm. From Michel Foucault's perspective in *Discipline and Punish*, the spectacle of public punishment thus functioned simultaneously to inspire fear and to correct a temporary imbalance, whereby a "momentarily injured sovereignty" was reconstituted. Foucault identifies public execution as both a judicial and a political ritual, in which power was first "eclipsed", then "restored" (1977, 48).<sup>5</sup> The public prominence of the scaffold imparted to the ritual an added intensity, particularly as it occurred "exactly at the juncture between the judgement of men and the judgement of God" (45). From this perspective, as Rebecca Lemon observes, confessional speeches were intended to instruct the crowd to avoid criminality and its inevitable punishment (2006, 85).

While Foucault's perspective is European, more recent scholarship has been concerned specifically with traditions and trends in England, exploring the scaffold speech and public execution in historical and literary contexts. J.A. Sharpe's (1985) view is essentially Foucauldian, while Peter Lake and Michael Questier consider the dying speech in the context of religious martyrdom, arguing that the gallows was "a numinous place where considerable spiritual power and charisma could be generated" (1996, 83). Elizabeth Bouldin acknowledges a distinction between the scaffold speeches of political traitors and heretics, observing that the former performed as "repentant citizens", whereas the latter spoke out as martyrs (2005, 19). Departing from these positions, Thomas W. Laqueur adopts a Bakhtinian perspective, contending that the seriousness of execution was significantly undermined by the carnivalesque atmosphere of the event, and maintains that the crowd was the most important element in the ritual (1989, 309).<sup>6</sup> Regardless of perspective, however, words spoken on the scaffold were of increasing importance during the sixteenth century; Sharpe describes the "last dying speech" as a "Tudor innovation" (1985, 165), while Katherine Royer suggests that the focus on last words—influenced by John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments*—developed as a result of the "introduction of subjectivity into the discourse of the scaffold" (2004, 65).<sup>7</sup>

The relationship between scaffold speeches and popular print has been

discussed elsewhere;<sup>8</sup> I shall therefore focus instead on the expectations associated with the scaffold speech and the format conventionally used. At the centre of the ritual stood the condemned traitor, who participated in a set of mutual obligations, including the state, the church and the attending crowd. To begin with, the state required the condemned individual to publicly acknowledge the justice of the death sentence, as part of the re-establishment of public order. The involvement of the clergy, representatives of whom visited the condemned in prison and offered spiritual guidance for the event, was essential for the prisoner to demonstrate preparedness for death and the afterlife. The crowd was equally indispensable, for it was required to register and absorb the message sent by the state and to bear witness to the final words of the condemned.

The conventional format for a traitor's scaffold speech was a three-part address. The first part pertained to the prisoner's obligations to the state, and was expected to incorporate a confession of the crime committed, a request for forgiveness from the sovereign, and a bestowal of blessings and wishes for future prosperity upon both the king and the realm (Bellamy 1979, 195-97). In the second part of the speech, the speaker might then "make requests concerning their debts, money that was owed to them and provision for their wives and children" (198). In the final part of the address it was customary for the condemned to pray, in direct preparation for dispatch to the next world (205-06).

Despite the expectations associated with the final speech, however, the constraints upon it were undoubtedly understood by at least some of those audience members who attended executions, suggesting that by the time *All Is True* was performed in 1613, the authenticity of the conventional scaffold speech may long have been in question. As Lemon observes, "a prisoner may well have uttered a formulaic speech because he or she was pressured by political, economic, and spiritual concerns during imprisonment; and when the audience was aware of such concerns, the reliability of the confession was clearly compromised" (2006, 89). Moreover, spectators who attended executions may have been frustrated by the predictability of these speeches: "As condemned subjects endlessly performed the same role on the scaffold, the crowd's faith in the authenticity of each confession may well have dwindled" (91). If the words became empty of meaning, spectators may have focused instead on the delivery of the speech, paying closer attention to voice and gesture; to what was omitted, rather than "correctly" performed.

Any public address constitutes a form of performance, and what Steven Mullaney describes as the "suggestive analogies" between the scaffold and the stage were commonplace in Renaissance England (1988,



117).<sup>9</sup> Stephen Greenblatt's concept of self-fashioning acknowledges the extent to which the scaffold performance could be deliberately shaped to project a specific image chosen by the condemned. In this context, he examines the scaffold conduct of Sir Walter Raleigh, executed for treason in 1618. Raleigh's was a fine performance, his demeanour a "calm and dignified rebuke to King James and the entire judicial system" (1973, 9). In contrast to the obediently penitent scaffold death in 1601 of Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex,<sup>10</sup> Raleigh's speech departed significantly from the "correct" formula (9). Greenblatt compares Raleigh's approach to that of a dramatist, writing a history play, who adapts his source material in order to shape his characters. In a similar manner, Raleigh artfully adjusted the information about his life in order to project a "desired last image" of himself to the crowd (19).

Returning to an instance from the Tudor period, Anne Boleyn's scaffold performance represents another form of departure from the usual conventions. E.W. Ives points out that, although Anne declared Henry VIII to be "ever a good, a gentle, and sovereign lord", she made "no public admission of sin, even of a general kind, and still less any confession that she had wronged Henry" (1986, 410). The news in London was that Anne had died "without the acceptance of the morality of the sentence which a truly penitent adultress should show", suggesting that although her speech was at least superficially acceptable, the crowd was "attuned to nuances" and "got the point nevertheless" (410). Oblique messages might thus be received by spectators at executions who were suitably attentive to careful phrasing or unique forms of delivery.

During the early modern period, it was commonly held that a dying person, about to face God, spoke only the truth. As Karl S. Guthke observes, last words were assumed to be truthful because "a man about to die and to meet his Maker and judge would not forfeit the possible salvation of his soul by ending his days bearing false witness" (1992, 37). This tradition is invoked in *Richard II*, in the dying John of Gaunt's lines: "they say the tongues of dying men / Enforce attention like deep harmony. / Where words are scarce they are seldom spent in vain, / For they breathe truth that breathe their words in pain" (2.1.5-8). This belief, however, may have been compromised on the scaffold through the association of treason with deliberate verbal manipulation. Cunningham argues that Protestant ideology "had circulated beyond itself the notion that truth and plain-speaking were identical" (2002, 13); if the prisoner had effectively been shown to harbour treasonous thoughts or intentions, then the "truth" of their scaffold address might be doubted. Eloquent self-defence in the courtroom could be given a sinister interpretation, for prosecutors

“typically posited a gap between the speech of the accused and a truth embedded in his or her deviant heart, and proceeded to create suspicion by associating verbal skill with deception” (Cunningham 2002, 14).

Mullaney observes that, from the early modern perspective, the rebel takes advantage of the “multiple senses of things, whether actions or words. The rebel or traitor is not a plain dealer, quite the opposite” (1988, 118). He “lies like truth”, deceiving others and seducing them into rebellion through an artful “abuse” of words (119). Such suspicion pertains to both the historical and the fictional duke. In his *Chronicles*, Holinshed describes Stafford as “an eloquent man”, and reports that when the indictment was read, the duke denied the charges and “alleged reasons to falsifie the indictment; pleading the matter for his owne iustification verie pithilie and earnestlie” (1965, 661). According to Harris, he refuted the charges against him “with such eloquence that everyone in the courtroom was deeply moved”, and so affected was the jury that “no one was able to pass sentence on him” (1986, 185-86). In the play, Buckingham’s facility with language is of central importance. The King himself speaks of the duke as a “learned and a most rare speaker,” a man “so complete, / Who was enrolled ’mongst wonders—and when we, / Almost with ravished listening, could not find / His hour of speech a minute” (1.2.111, 118-21).

Suspicion in the courtroom, then, may have been transferred to the traitor on the scaffold, making the scaffold speech problematic: a confession might be delivered truthfully, in a state of genuine remorse (in which case the prisoner could hope for salvation), or it may be construed as further evidence of the traitor’s dissembling nature and therefore considered untrustworthy (signalling inevitable damnation). The speech may thus have been characterised by the same issues of ambiguity as the treason trial that preceded it.

Despite their numerous echoes of Holinshed, Shakespeare and Fletcher have significantly altered their source material. Holinshed reports the duke’s response, upon hearing his death sentence:

My lord of Norffolke, you haue said as a traitor should be said vnto, but I was neuer anie: but my lords I nothing maligne for that you haue doone to me, but the eternall God forgiue you my death, and I doo: I shall neuer sue to the king for life, howbeit he is a gracious prince, and more grace may come from him than I desire. I desire you my lords and all my fellowes to pray for me. (qtd. in Holinshed 662)

The chronicle further describes how Stafford is led through the city and brought to the Tower, thus distinguishing the day of his sentencing from

the day of his execution on 17 May. On the 17th, the duke was led to Tower Hill, “where he said he had offended the kings grace through negligence and lacke of grace, and destred all noble men to beware by him, and all men to pray for him, and that he trusted to die the kings true man. Thus meekelie with an axe he tooke his death” (662).

In contrast to this brief account, Shakespeare and Fletcher permit Buckingham to speak at length, boldly and passionately. He is given greater freedom, for he delivers his words from an indeterminate location, between the courtroom and the site of execution. The playwrights have combined the post-arraignment speech with the last dying speech, so that together they function as Buckingham’s final words on the scaffold. As Bowers suggests, the duke’s address is “really one speech, interrupted by his official handover to the execution party” (1986, 11).

For the sake of analysis, I have divided Buckingham’s speech in Act 2, Scene 1 into three parts: the first includes lines 55-94; the second begins at line 100 and ends mid-line at 131; and the final, very short section, picks up from line 131 and ends at line 135. Structurally, the duke’s speech conforms to the established formula, but in content it deviates significantly. On the surface, much of what he says appears to be quite conventional, but in its political implications—particularly in the second part of the speech, which does not occur in the chronicle—it is potentially inflammatory.

The first part of the duke’s address would be expected to incorporate confession, a request for forgiveness, and a bestowal of blessings upon the king and the realm. Buckingham, rather than confessing to guilt, however, instead maintains his innocence:

I have this day received a traitor’s judgement,  
And by that name must die; yet heaven bear witness,  
And if I have a conscience, let it sink me,  
Even as the axe falls, if I be not faithful. (2.1.58-61)

The duke projects an air of fearlessness at the prospect of standing before God, implying that his conscience will be able to withstand divine scrutiny as his inner self is revealed. He struggles to forgive those who have condemned him, but suddenly loses his composure as he is inwardly prompted to anger and the desire for revenge:

The law I bear no malice for my death—  
'T has done upon the premises but justice—  
But those that sought it I could wish more Christians.  
Be what they will, I heartily forgive 'em.

Yet let 'em look they glory not in mischief  
 Nor build their evils on the graves of great men,  
 For then my guiltless blood must cry against 'em. (62-68)

His forgiveness sits uncomfortably alongside his expressed anxiety that his enemies will “glory” in his demise. Moreover, Buckingham’s “guiltless blood” invites his audience to view him as a martyr-like casualty of Henry’s administration.

From his assumed position of moral superiority, the duke next asks those present to pray for him, apparently with the intention of concluding his speech. Yet Sir Thomas Lovell’s request for forgiveness prompts the duke to grant his wish, and to extend forgiveness to all, including the king. At this point Buckingham declares himself to be “half in heaven”:

My vows and prayers  
 Yet are the King’s and, till my soul forsake,  
 Shall cry for blessings on him. May he live  
 Longer than I have time to tell his years;  
 Ever beloved and loving may his rule be;  
 And when old Time shall lead him to his end,  
 Goodness and he fill up one monument. (88-94)

From his half-way position between heaven and earth, the duke encourages his audience to view him from the vantage point of the future; in a distinctly metatheatrical manoeuvre, the Jacobean theatre audience members become the “future” witnesses to the ambiguities and unresolved elements of his condemnation, as he encourages his listeners to question the justice of his death.<sup>11</sup>

On the surface, this part of his speech appears to be quite acceptable. If, however, Henry is to “live longer” than the duke has “time to tell his years”, this allotment of time might be very small indeed, given the proximity of the execution. Moreover, Buckingham’s reference to “old Time” leading the king “to his end” might be interpreted as treasonously imagining the king’s death. Does this represent an unfortunate choice of words, the implications of which Buckingham is unaware, or is it a speech constructed with deliberate cleverness? If the latter is true, then is the duke repeating an earlier offence, or is he pointedly committing treason for the first time in an ironic attempt to justify his condemnation?

Lovell now passes Buckingham over to Sir Nicholas Vaux for the journey by barge to the Tower. At this stage, however, the duke’s verbal descent from “Duke of Buckingham” to “poor Edward Bohun” (2.1.103) inspires him to further speech, for he is “now stripped of all property and

formality" (Bowers 1986, 11). Suddenly fierce, he declares, "I am richer than my base accusers, / That never knew what truth meant. I now seal it, / And with that blood will make 'em one day groan for't" (2.1.104-106). Monta points out the duke's use of "the standard martyrological trope of sealing one's testimony with blood" (2000, 277); moreover, she argues that the "problems of testimony" are related to the conflict which is generated between "outer appearance and the testimony of inner conscience" (276). Buckingham purposefully develops the image of himself as a martyr, whose "inner conscience" is a secret shared with God, while the spectators are witnesses merely to his "outer appearance."

Moreover, while the duke does not willingly embrace his death as a martyr would, he draws upon his own sense of injustice and uses it to shape his public performance. In one sense, his "half in heaven" status allows him a privileged vantage point, for he partially absents himself through evoking a shifting temporal perspective. He moves from the present tense—"I am richer"—to the past tense, in "That never knew what truth meant"; he returns to the present tense for "I now seal it," as though to indicate that he is simultaneously present and absent.

Buckingham, emboldened by the lack of interruption, now speaks at greater length and with gathering momentum. Whereas he has attempted, in the earlier part of his address, to follow the conventional structure of the scaffold speech, he appears to realise that his situation is less formal than that of the actual execution, and is attended by a fewer number of officials. In response, he suddenly abandons his reserve, seizing impulsively the opportunity to speak more boldly. Seemingly propelled by inner conviction, Buckingham swiftly shifts his focus to the injustice of his own father's execution in 1483.<sup>12</sup> This remembered event is clearly identified as part of an historical cycle, and suggests that Buckingham's present martyrdom has its origin in a past over which he has had no control. He recounts how his father, who "raised head against usurping Richard", was then betrayed by his own servant, and was condemned to death without a trial. Following this loss, however, Buckingham explains that Henry the Seventh showed compassion and,

like a most royal prince,  
Restored me to my honours and out of ruins  
Made my name once more noble. Now his son,  
Henry the Eighth, life, honour, name, and all  
That made me happy at one stroke has taken  
For ever from the world. (2.1.107-18)

This bold speech traces a pattern of rise and fall, dependent on the

seemingly arbitrary whims of the presiding monarch. Indeed, Buckingham's deliberate self-characterization as a martyr is inseparable from his conception of himself—and of his father before him—as being trapped in what McMullan calls the “nightmare of cyclical history” (2000, 70). Jonathan Baldo proposes that the duke imagines the “fate of oblivion” that awaits him, in that his “personal and family history has traced a series of cycles of oblivion and restoration, now apparently at an end” (2004, 377). Buckingham, however, is more resistant to his fate than Baldo's assessment implies. Within this publicly proclaimed narrative of injustice, both Henry of Buckingham and his son appear as victims of cruel circumstance, in situations maddeningly parallel: the duke speaks dangerously, implicating both Richard and Henry VIII, attempting to exonerate his father and, by association, himself. In performance, it would be possible for Buckingham to appear innocent, a wronged man struggling to come to terms with an unjust fate. Alternatively, if he is perceived as guilty, his speech must be interpreted as merely a clever piece of rhetoric, a deliberate concealment of his treasonous self.

This part of the speech is the most significant alteration to the source material, particularly as it incorporates a reassertion of the duke's claim to innocence as the “truth” of “a dying man” (2.1.125). Buckingham is not silenced, despite the dangerous implications of his words; he is careful enough, however, to express his subversive views by couching them in terms of a warning against treacherous servants. As a “dying man,” he advises:

Where you are liberal of your loves and counsels,  
 Be sure you be not loose; for those you make friends  
 And give your hearts to, when they once perceive  
 The least rub in your fortunes, fall away  
 Like water from ye, never found again  
 But where they mean to sink ye. (126-31)

As Stafford was condemned at his trial—as Holinshed reports—by “a duke, a marques, seuen earles, & twelue barons” (1965, 662), it would seem that, in the play, Buckingham's diatribe against servants is a thinly-veiled remonstrance against the peers who have pronounced him guilty.

The duke now moves on to the final part of his speech. On the scaffold, this section of the speech had a distinctly religious orientation, for the thoughts of the condemned were focused on God, whilst prayer demonstrated the prisoner's readiness for death and the afterlife. Buckingham's speech does end with a request for the crowd to pray for him, but his tone of weary resignation has less the fervency of final prayer,

than the feeling of an actor reluctantly playing out a role that has been assigned to him. He encourages his listeners to “remember” him, once his tragedy has concluded:

All good people,  
Pray for me. I must now forsake ye. The last hour  
Of my long weary life is come upon me.  
Farewell, and when you would say something that is sad,  
Speak how I fell. I have done, and God forgive me. (131-35)

Whether Buckingham is guilty or not is, ultimately, immaterial. What is important is that he envisions himself as a political martyr and consciously, consummately, inhabits the role as he performs it publicly, challenging the boundaries of the conventional scaffold speech as he does so. In this last part of his speech he resumes the earlier tone of humility, as he asks his listeners to contemplate the tragedy of his downfall. Yet his exhortation to the crowd to speak of him as “something that is sad” echoes his earlier strategy of placing himself within a wider historical context, thereby appealing to the Jacobean playhouse audience to vindicate him. The duke thus functions as part of Shakespeare and Fletcher’s larger design in *All Is True*, to invite reinterpretations of specific events in the history of the Reformation.

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