

## **“We princes are set on stages” Performing Power in Elizabethan England**

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### **Abstract**

The aim of this article is to explore Elizabeth's performative power as manifesting itself on the scaffold and on the stage, in royal portraits and processions. Drawing on Foucault and new historicism, it will discuss the Queen's reliance on spectacle and ambiguity to enhance her authority and reach the population at large.

**Key words:** Elizabeth I, spectacle, ambiguity of power, Foucault, Shakespeare, *Henry V*

This paper will focus on sovereign power in Elizabethan England as it manifests itself on the scaffold and on the stage, in royal portraits and processions. Drawing on Foucault and new historicism it sets out to discuss the question of how much Elizabeth – through the media and discursive practices of her time – relies on visibility, theatricality and paradox to enhance her authority. While the scaffold and the stage, highlighting the conflation of punitive and theatrical modes, operate with displays of state power, royal portraits and processions expose the monarch herself to the public gaze – in iconographic and real modes.

## THE SCAFFOLD

Foucault in his *Discipline and Punish* traces the development from bodily torture as a public spectacle making state power visible in the medieval and early modern periods to carceral institutions shifting the focus of control to the mind. He claims that the public execution is not only a judicial, but also a political ritual that makes power manifest. The crime attacks its victim and ultimately the sovereign whose power is restored in the punishment (Foucault 47–48). Hence, the public execution is meant to show “the dissymmetry between the subject who has dared to violate the law and the all-powerful sovereign who displays his strength” (49).

Foucault identifies the people watching as the main characters in the spectacle of the scaffold, whose ambiguous roles are seeing, being made afraid, participating, witnessing and guaranteeing the punishment. He also mentions the possible inversion of the executions, which reveal aspects of carnival, with authority being mocked and criminals becoming heroes. Thus, the role of the crowd un masks sovereign power as fragile and vulnerable. And in the long run it becomes obvious that the executions do not even frighten the people. The criminal has nothing to lose in the face of death and thus entertains the cheering crowd with curses and blasphemies. As for the gallows speeches Foucault is skeptical about their honest acknowledgement of crime and punishment, seeing the pamphlets that have come down to us as mostly fictional speeches later printed and circulated for the purpose of suggesting ideological control (57–68).

Jonathan Sharpe’s “Last Dying Speeches” is a Foucauldian reading of 17<sup>th</sup> century English executions as a theatre of punishment. The victim’s stereotyped farewell speech does not address the crime in question but gives a general account of past sinfulness, with the purpose of warning future delinquents, to make visible – and audible – the internalisation of obedience and the state’s ideological control, to make those about to be executed acknowledge the justice of their punishment. They play their part via this last speech while the watching crowds are indispensable for the legitimization of the execution (Sharpe 158–163), which would be

murder without the crowd as witness. The spectacular public execution is so to speak a moral imperative (Höfele 49-50).

The dramatic performance on the scaffold is a principal method of demonstrating the power of the state and asserting its legitimacy. It is meant to show the people that crime does not pay although the deterrent effects should not be overestimated (Sharpe 166-167), if we consider the huge number of executions conducted for centuries from the Elizabethan period onward. Public executions and hangings at Tyburn amount to 6160 during Elizabeth's reign (Smith 217). There are very few remaining unrepentant and obviously very few last minute reprieves under Elizabeth I. These pardons may also have reminded the people of royal power, as Thomas Laqueur acknowledges in "Crowds, Carnival and the State in English Executions" (325), which also refers to the post-Elizabethan period, but his and Sharpe's central tenets apply to the 16<sup>th</sup> century as well. Laqueur focuses on the carnivalesque aspect of these spectacles, on their openness and unpredictability. The whole atmosphere borders on the risible and chaotic with executions often failing their purpose of demonstrating state authority as they are random occasions, held in unfavourable locations. Tyburn is a desolate place outside a barnyard and quite in line with carnival beyond the borders of civilisation, thus having little potential for state power, signs of which are strikingly absent from the execution scene. And strangely enough, the state seems to lack interest and authorial control and hardly tries to direct the behaviour of the condemned. Although many of them perform their role according to expectation, others deliberately undermine the scenario through comic behaviour, provocative clothes or some other kind of defiant performance. And even if those about to die do not laugh in the face of authority, executions provide comic entertainment for the audience (Laqueur 309-323).

Processions to Tyburn are a wild and heterogeneous carnival crowd, united by their concern with disorder, noise and drink, thus reminiscent of the public theatres on the Southbank or in Shoreditch. Socially diverse as they themselves are they guarantee the equal treatment of all condemned, irrespective of their social rank. And when executions are finally no longer public, they become untheatrical and thus irrelevant (Laqueur 352-355) – in line with Foucault's statement that "[p]unishment had gradually ceased to be a spectacle" (9).

Carnival in the Bakhtinian sense of "celebrat[ing] temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order [and] mark[ing] the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions" (10) would seriously impair the sovereign's power. I would still argue for a synthetic view of public executions displaying carnivalesque characteristics but more so visible signs of royal power, above all in 16<sup>th</sup> century religious matters. Elizabeth's execution of Catholics is a way of consolidating her visible power as a Protestant monarch.

The Catholic victim on the scaffold is subject to the power of the Protestant state which insists that the felon dies as a traitor and not as a heretic (Lake and Questier 69). Mary Stuart challenges this code by stressing her dying as a martyr to her Catholic faith (Höfele 48). The state's recoding heresy into treason illustrates its somewhat limited power in the delicate issue of religion. Especially the well-documented executions of prominent Jesuits like Edmund Campion or Thomas Cottam attract huge crowds. Though the Protestant state can mostly rely on the support of the London crowd, the latter is still fickle and their response hard to predict. And apart from Protestants, also Catholics attend the spectacle as well as people without any particular religious reason, who simply wish to be entertained. So the setting offers a site for various groups trying to bend the event's rituals to their own purposes and to construct individual meanings of it. And just like the crowd has its own agenda, so do those to be executed. Still, apart from the 1588 rush in the execution of 14 priests, which is accompanied by convenient propaganda, the state stresses its relative leniency towards Catholics, who can easily avoid death. Elizabeth is rather reticent about too much indulgence in bloodthirstiness and, here again, ambivalent on the issue of how to treat Catholics (Lake and Questier 70-88).

The horrible practice of displaying the victim's body when taken on a cart to Tyburn signifies the power of the state in the Foucauldian sense of disciplining the populace. The criminal body serves as a bearer of state ideology. Making the scaring violence of the punishment visible shapes people's view of state power, but turns out not to be an effective deterrent instrument. On the other hand, at the moment of facing death the Catholic traitor can use their scaffold speech to say whatever (s)he wants, is firmly in control of the performance and "free to play their parts according to their own reading of the script" (Lake and Questier 103).

The mixture of violence and farce, punishment and carnival, defiance and obedience, religion and ideology exposes the state's unstable authority due to unpredictable role playing and audience response (Lake and Questier 107). Sharpe speaks of "a part [...] played" (162) most effectively by English criminals about to be executed and Laqueur linguistically confirms this alliance of scaffold and stage thus: "[T]he state clearly did not enjoy a monopoly on the writing of scripts for its own juridical playhouse" (329). And the common people watching can take part in state action just as they can as groundlings in the pit when watching an actor perform a royal role on the apron stage in one of Shakespeare's history plays.

Thus, however fragile or variable the dynamics between Protestant authority, Catholic victim and participating crowd is, the execution is a celebration of monarchical power with a clear counterpart in the theatrical world whose protagonists involve authors, actors and audience in an equally fluid performance open to various interpretations. And the resemblances between them go beyond these: In

the 1570s the first permanent structures for either mode of spectacle are erected: in 1571, the Triple Tree for public hangings at Tyburn, a rural area outside London (Smith 218), and in 1576, the first public theatre in Shoreditch, upon which many others will follow both here and on the Bankside in Southwark. The raised platform of the public theatre – incidentally called ‘scaffold’ in *Henry V*’s Prologue (1.0.10) – makes its affinity with the scaffold all too obvious. Both Tyburn and London’s public theatre districts lie outside the official jurisdiction of the city. Attending executions and theatre performances alike are favourite Elizabethan pastimes. Despite the brutal disemboweling, quartering, boiling and public display, executions and hangings are staged rituals abounding in breathtaking suspense like the performances of Kyd’s *Spanish Tragedy* or Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* – execution-as-theatre and theatre-as-execution in Höfele’s terms (62). Both share a small entrance fee making sure that all classes can attend – with seats for few people, while the majority are standing. Food and drinks are sold and at Tyburn also pamphlets recording the life and crimes of the victim (Smith 218). So the whole atmosphere at Tyburn is strongly reminiscent of the one that Andrew Gurr so fascinatingly describes for the public theatre in his *Playgoing in Shakespeare’s London*.

## THE STAGE

Elizabeth licenses the profession of playing against much resistance and aspires to establish the theatre as a means of manifesting her power. The connection between theatricality and power is obvious from many facts, such as the hierarchical seating of the spectators around the monarch on the stage at court and their response to the relationship between the play and the royal spectator. Also, the stage costumes are real court clothes, especially in history plays (Orgel, *Power* 5–10).

In a Foucauldian take on the mechanisms of power Greenblatt sheds light on its connection with performance both in the Elizabethan world and on its stage:

Queen Elizabeth [is] a ruler without a standing army, without a highly developed bureaucracy, without an extensive police force, a ruler whose power is constituted in theatrical celebrations of royal glory and theatrical violence visited upon the enemies of that glory. [Her] power [...] depends upon its privileged visibility. As in a theatre, the audience must be powerfully engaged by this visible presence. (Greenblatt, *Negotiations* 64)

For him “[t]heatricality is [...] one of power’s essential modes” (46) and Shakespeare and the Elizabethan playing companies are most successful in absorbing

and exploiting much of the “energies of a political authority that was itself already committed to histrionic display and hence was ripe for appropriation” (40).

Tennenhouse generally claims that “[t]he Renaissance monarch understood himself or herself as deriving power from being the object of the public gaze” (155). But even though the Queen “believed deeply [...] in display, ceremony, and decorum, the whole theatrical apparatus of royal power” (Greenblatt, *Renaissance* 167), her famous saying “We princes are set on stages, in the sight and view of all the world duly observed”<sup>1</sup> cannot be understood only in the sense of displaying and exercising royal power. The statement is uttered in the context of her signing Mary Stuart’s death warrant and reveals rather her exposure to the gaze of her subjects that she feels uncomfortable with. She seems at times to have perceived her own visibility as a kind of burden (Mullaney 96-97) making her vulnerable. Montrose disagrees with Greenblatt’s claiming a close link between “a poetics of Elizabethan power” and “a poetics of the theater” (*Negotiations* 64) and would rather locate Shakespeare’s theatre beyond the total control of the state. Elizabeth being exposed to the observation and evaluation of her subjects implies limited royal control of her own public image and of personations of herself on the public stage. In order to control at least the latter kind of dramatic representations, the state is keen to strictly regulate them. Elizabeth seeks to control meaning making in the domain of cultural production absolutely. In contrast to Greenblatt, Montrose considers royal power rather demystified and destabilised through theatrical representation on the Shakespearean stage. The Queen’s licensing of playing might be an attempt at the containment of critical discourses, which can never be fully achieved (Montrose, “Stage” 46-49). And it is less the theatre and its moral implications that bother the city authorities, than the political issue of who controls the means for representing power (Tennenhouse 95).

The relationship between the crown and the Renaissance stage is thus complicated, ambiguous and full of tension between intimacy and danger and can work both ways – as a celebration of royal authority and – theoretically – as the opposite, because “[t]he theater is too anarchic to be [...] confined” (Orgel, *Authentic* 86) by its patrons’ intentions. The theatrical, performing greatness, “is highly charged because it employs precisely the same methods the crown was using to assert and validate its own authority” (Orgel, *Authentic* 84). Personations of a royal role can even border on rebellion if we think of *Richard II* and its deposed monarch.

1 The metaphor of the player-monarch is often used by Elizabeth and also by James I, who, in his *Basilicon Doron* puts it thus: “The king is as one set upon a scaffold”, in a later edition emended to “stage” (Orgel, *Authentic* 87-88). The ambiguous ‘scaffold’ is perfectly suited to illustrate the connection between the stage and the block, but also the vague danger that James must have felt about his royal role.

This connection between crown and stage will be examined precisely by means of Shakespeare's history play *Henry V*, "an enthusiastic display of performative kingship" (Montrose, *Playing* 82). Apart from comedies, Shakespeare focuses on history plays during Elizabeth's reign. They can operate reassuringly in the context of the unsettled succession that would strengthen Elizabeth's position in the sense that at least some of the previous rulers of England have died childless and not led the country into ruin. And via theatrical illusion they can offer a special kind of protection against censorship. They are all about royal roles representing historical English kings on the stage that certainly invite comparison with the reigning monarch by triggering mental frames in the audience. Depending on the play this comparison can work either way – it can support royal authority but also potentially damage it, as in *Richard II* and its commissioned performance on the eve of the Essex Rebellion, in which the theatre seems to have the potential to subvert the authority of the state despite the Queen's efforts to protect it against the latter. This ideological bias can even be inherent in one and the same play, as the case of *Henry V* demonstrates. This play can be read as celebrating Elizabethan power but also as pointing at a dramatic crisis at the end of her reign. It has been considered as the play in which Shakespeare comes "closest to state propaganda, [but even here] the construction of ideology is complex" (Dollimore and Sinfield 214). The legitimations of power and war in *Henry V* doubtless remind the playgoer in the Globe of those in Elizabethan England: The Bishop of Ely assures King Henry of the rightfulness of his pretensions in France underpinning his power rooted in nature (Dollimore and Sinfield 216-17):

You are their heir, you sit upon their throne.  
The blood and courage that renownèd them  
Runs in your veins ... (1.2.117-119)

just like the Bishop of Exeter encourages him by arguing that France belongs to him "by gift of heaven,/By law of nature and of nations..." (2.4.80-81) in contrast to the French King's "borrowed glories" (2.4.80). And again in the honey-bees speech the Archbishop of Canterbury convinces Henry of the legitimacy of his war in France. Power is legitimised by a God-given order, "a rule in nature" (1.2.188) that demands obedience from its subjects:

... Therefore doth heaven divide  
The state of man in diverse functions,  
Setting endeavour in continual motion,  
To which is fixèd as an aim or butt  
Obedience. For so work the honey bees,  
Creatures that by a rule in nature teach  
The act of order to a peopled kingdom. (1.2.183-189)

In much the same manner Bishop Andrewes in a sermon assures Elizabeth of the sanctity of her war in Ireland: “At this time against these enemies it is a war sanctified” (Andrewes 325).

Even though *Henry V* is about national unity, it also revolves around threatening insurrection that is lurking in Elizabethan England as well. In his famous soliloquy on the eve of the battle of Agincourt Henry is both aware of the ideological role of ceremony and of the danger of deceptive obedience which he is unable to ensure and control. Just like Elizabeth he complains about the burden of royal responsibility and about being subject to theatrical representation:

We must bear all.  
O hard condition, twin-born with greatness,  
Subject to the breath of every fool, whose sense  
No more can feel but his own wringing.  
What infinite heart's ease must kings neglect  
That private men enjoy?  
And what have kings that privates have not too,  
Save ceremony, save general ceremony? (4.1.205-212)

Identifying ceremony as the only thing that distinguishes him from the common man Henry goes on to unmask it as hollow, thus revealing his fundamental doubts about monarchical authority.

... Oh, be sick, great greatness,  
And bid thy ceremony give thee cure.  
Think'st thou the fiery fever will go out  
With titles blown from adulation? (4.1.224-227)

His insight into the mechanisms of flattery together with the burden of responsibility for his country epitomise the loneliness and restlessness of power that make him envy the sound sleep of a “wretched slave”:

I am a king that find thee, and I know  
'Tis not the balm, the scepter and the ball,  
The sword, the mace, the crown imperial,  
The intertissued robe of gold and pearl,  
The farcèd title running 'fore the king,  
The throne he sits on, nor the tide of pomp  
That beats upon the high shore of this world;  
No, not all these, thrice-gorgeous ceremony,  
Not all these, laid in bed majestical,  
Can sleep so soundly as the wretched slave (4.1.232-241)

It is of course more than ironic when a man who is responsible for an invasion costing thousands of lives pities his own fate of which the well-sleeping common man knows nothing:

The slave, a member of the country's peace,  
Enjoys it, but in gross brain little wots  
What watch the king keeps to maintain the peace (4.1.254-256)

This subversion of the king's glorification – also evident in the mismatches between the Choruses and what follows – can be read as an ambiguous characterisation of Henry on Shakespeare's part, but one that paradoxically is to intensify his power and the theatrical interest in the play. For Greenblatt only equivocal celebrations of royal power have theatrical force; the charismatic authority of monarch and stage alike depend upon subversive ambiguity (*Negotiations* 62-63). This ties in with the creation of theatrical illusion by playwright, players and audience who must invent the ideal king; the Prologue explicitly appeals to their "thoughts that now must deck our kings" (1.0.28) whose imperfections they are invited to "piece out" (1.0.23). And this necessity extends beyond the theatre into real life. Royal power is shown to its subjects in the same way as a play in a theatre to its spectators. The apparent production of subversion, the paradoxes and ambiguities of power, are its very condition in Elizabethan England (Greenblatt, *Negotiations* 65).

The analogy between the fictional Henry V and the real Elizabeth I is blurred, however, by the role of the Earl of Essex who rivals the Queen in the last years of her reign. Henry's victory in France and his return to England have often been compared to Essex's campaign in Ireland and his expected successful return home. But this comparison is not flawless. First of all, in the end Essex does not prove to be successful. His unapproved return home without having crushed the Irish rebellion deteriorates his by then already troubled relationship with Elizabeth I and ultimately leads to his execution. Even more importantly, Henry has the great advantage over Elizabeth of uniting in his person the roles of military general in the battlefield and political ruler of the kingdom. Thus he is not confronted with the problem of a mighty rival whom Elizabeth faces in the person of Essex. In this sense, Dollimore and Sinfield consider *Henry V* "a powerful Elizabethan fantasy simply because it represented a single source of power in the state" (223). This leads to a third problem arising from the two radically different versions of Shakespeare's *Henry V* text that make for its controversial cultural functions. If we take the dominant Folio text, the equation to be made would rather be between Henry V and the Earl of Essex, to whom Shakespeare in the Chorus to the final act makes the only reference to contemporary politics in his whole oeuvre when addressing the

... general of our gracious empress,  
 (As in good time he may) from Ireland coming,  
 Bringing rebellion broachèd on his sword (5.0.30-32)

And yet this anticipation makes sense for only a couple of months in 1599 – before Essex infamously returns home. This version pays tribute to the Earl of Essex, but line 32 might still sound alarming both to an Elizabethan audience and to the Queen. Either way, the play can hardly serve as celebrating Elizabeth's unique power. If, however, we assume, as Annabel Patterson does, the Quarto text to be closer to the actual performance before London audiences, Henry may well have been perceived as Elizabeth. This Quarto version lacking the Choruses and thereby Henry's glorifications, might still be more sympathetic to the king because the ironic mismatches with the subsequent scenes are also missing. Patterson reads the Quarto version of *Henry V* "as presenting yet another symbolic portrait of [Elizabeth]" (46).

## PORTRAITS

The queen's attempts to control royal portraiture have been stressed by Roy Strong, who has published widely in the field of Elizabethan portraits. Despite her vanity, Elizabeth is quite reluctant to sit in the early years of her reign. This will change after her excommunication in 1570, when, with the incipient vogue for portraits, displaying a queenly portrait in one's house also becomes a pledge of loyalty. In addition, the portraits reflect her two bodies as royal queen and virtuous lady and justify her omnipotence over Church and State. While at home official illuminations as icons of royal power and Protestantism are instrumentalised as powerful visual propaganda, hideous pictures of her as the scourge of Catholic martyrs, for instance, circulate abroad, especially after Mary Stuart's execution. Still, the ostentatious reliance on royal portraits reveals a strange contradiction in a Protestant state that is otherwise so keen on condemning (religious) images as Catholic idolatry (Strong, *Portraits* 5-42).

The portraits of the post-1588 period are impressive icons of royal political power. The Armada portrait with its not too subtle dichotomy of a Spanish Armada sinking under a dark sky and an English fleet sailing in sunshine portrays Elizabeth with her hand on the globe, thus underlining her claim to world domination. In a similar manner, the Ditchley portrait shows her standing on a map of England – her feet placed on Oxfordshire. In this portrait, "Elizabeth is England, woman and kingdom are interchangeable" (Strong, *Gloriana* 136). A new dimension added here and reiterated in the Rainbow portrait is "the association of [her] monarchical presence with cosmic control of the elements"

(Strong, *Gloriana* 138). But the Rainbow portrait goes one step further. Coming out during Elizabeth’s last great spectacle, her 1602 visit to Robert Cecil at Hatfield, its message is more hidden, yet all the more far-reaching. The jewel in serpent form on her left sleeve symbolises royal wisdom. In her right hand she holds a rainbow of peace with the motto “Non sine sole Iris” – there is no rainbow without the sun. At first sight, this identifies her as the source of light and life and alludes to the common metaphor inherent in the Elizabethan world view of the monarch as the ruler of the state in line with the sun as the ruler of the heavens. Many critics including Strong have stressed the rainbow as uniting religious and secular symbols. What is striking is its lack of colours, which permits two ambivalent readings, a subversive one emphasising the Queen’s fading radiance and a glorifying one that sees her as outshining even the rainbow (Fischlin 197-198). The political agenda – overlooked by most critics – is suggested by Neill (29-31), who decodes the Latin tag as subtly linking Elizabeth’s posture with the conquest of Ireland, one of whose ancient names is Iris. Read this way, there is no Ireland without the Queen. Anticipating the Irish rebel Tyrone’s surrender to Essex’s successor Mountjoy and thus the English victory of 1603, which will end the Nine Years’ War, the portrait appropriates the rainbow to symbolise – not very peacefully – the incorporation of the Irish into the English nation.

Apart from this creepy staging of royal power, the eyes and ears on Elizabeth’s rich Irish mantle come close to suggesting a kind of Foucauldian panoptic control that her all-seeing power seems to strive for. According to Foucault

the major effect of the Panopticon [is] to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary. (201)

In the same manner, Elizabeth’s critical (Irish) subjects are exposed to permanent potential control by the sovereign’s all-encompassing gaze whose very potentiality should make them comply with the rules dictated by the state. Bentham’s principle that “power should be visible and unverifiable” (Foucault 201) translates into Elizabethan (upper class) subjects looking at Elizabeth / the Rainbow portrait but never knowing whether they are being looked at in a particular moment even though they must be aware it may always be the case. Here again, there is potential for a subversive reading, as Fischlin (201) also concedes. The mantle that enrobes Elizabeth might also reveal her dependence on Ireland. In addition, the Queen and her mantle – programmatic of her snoopiness to see and hear

everything – might remind us of Shakespeare's Henry V spying on his subjects in Erpingham's cloak (Neill 29):

Lend me thy cloak, Sir Thomas. Brothers both,  
Commend me to the princes in our camp. (4.1.24-25)

Identifying the nation with her own royal body, Elizabeth with her bridal coiffure poses as the spouse of her kingdom. This, in turn, establishes yet another analogy to Henry V's marriage to the French princess who comments on the event as a double kingdom wedding:

As man and wife, being two, are one in love,  
So be there 'twixt your kingdoms such a spousal  
...  
That English may as French, French Englishmen,  
Receive each other. ... (5.2.324-331)

In a similar manner, the all-seeing Elizabeth of the Rainbow portrait would be going to create a nation of "Irish Englishmen" – as Shakespeare might prophetically announce in the Epilogue (Neill 32).

## PROCESSIONS AND PAGEANTS

Portraits on the one hand and pageants, tilts and tournaments on the other are closely related in terms of imagery (Strong, *Gloriana* 135) and the message they convey. Urban royal entries and rural royal progresses where pageants are presented have been perceived as exhibitions of royal power, and as visible and effective state propaganda. Processions are an important constituent of the cult of the Queen that also address the ordinary citizens. Theatre, entertainment and ceremony, especially their ambiguous and often subversive dimensions, are employed by Elizabeth to make power visible. Through the ceremonial aspect of the literally theatrical the stage can mirror the court spectacles. The powerful attraction of pageantry is most visible in traditional values of a chivalric code which Elizabeth, as a legally illegitimate daughter, needs to legitimise her authority (Orgel, *Authentic* 75-77). The royal entry is designed as a means of communication between herself and the urban classes. Her rather traditional 1559 entry into London is a triumph for the Protestant Reformation (Strong, *Art* 11-12). Still, Montrose (*Playing* 27) is anxious to stress the secular character of the ceremony. The official record of this entry characterises "the citie of London [as] a stage wherin was shewed the wonderfull spectacle, of a noble hearted princesse

toward her most loving people" (qtd. in Montrose, *Playing* 26). The theatricality of power is all too evident in this depiction and in Elizabeth's speech and behaviour by which "she heralded the new importance that her reign would give to the performativity of sovereignty" (Montrose, *Playing* 27). She offers a show of mutual love, self-sacrifice and virginal motherhood including a manipulative speech casting royal power into romantic and erotic relations (Harington qtd. in Greenblatt, *Renaissance* 168-169). She pays for parts of the pageant and is involved in the (not so spontaneous) preparations. In contrast to James I, she plays at being part of the pageants and is communicating with her people on entering London (Goldberg 29-31).

Strong claims that the cult of the Queen is promoted by the progresses which consolidate support for her regime, make its attitudes popular and the abstract monarchy concrete in the presence of the Queen (*Art* 77).<sup>2</sup> She relies more than any other Renaissance monarch on these royal visits which provide a public stage on which to demonstrate her royal authority and to interact with her subjects in the calculating hope of support. The royal goals in matters of religion and war thus achieved are worth the huge financial investment and the burdens of travel. Elizabeth uses the power of her royal presence to set a religious example by regularly attending Mass and thus demonstrating royal and religious authority (Cole 1, 140). She is so much convinced of the progresses as enhancing her royal image and popularity that she enforces them against the advice of her counsellors – even taking profit from the discrepancy between inconvenienced court members and welcoming hosts, as this disruptive climate sharpens her royal power at the centre of everyone's attention, and facilitates her ability to rule and preserve her independence. With the strategies of intentional confusion and delaying decisions she forges her authority (Cole 4-11). Still, in the 1580s, when religious threats affect her safety, the progresses are curtailed. And she is too cautious to visit the (Catholic) north of England. In terms of personal diplomacy, Elizabeth relies on royal displays, public appearances and interaction between herself and her subjects. The presence of ambassadors procures her an international audience to demonstrate her royal power. Many of them come to secure marriage with her, which she encourages to avoid war and keep control of foreign negotiations. The progresses

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2 William Leahy challenges the view of the enormous success of royal processions as public relations events by seeing them spatially limited to regions where Elizabeth feels safe and popular and temporally limited to unproblematic decades. In other words, these progresses confirm the status quo, but they are not exploited as a means of winning over potentially hostile people or regions (1-5). He seeks to demonstrate that the heterogeneous mass of the common people are likely not to have been successfully subjected by the progresses, not to have reconstituted sovereign power (12-17). His claim is refuted by Cole (12) who claims that the Elizabethan monarchy reaches a wide audience including the common man.

often give her flexibility and freedom of maneuver or even manipulation, and she uses the power of her presence to indicate (dis)favour. But she also takes advantage of progresses to emphasise England's military strength (that her male colleagues fulfil in battles) and her own responsibility as protectress of the kingdom. To audiences at home and abroad military pageants and tilts suggest personal and national reputation, strength, victory, unity and her symbolic participation in battles. In times of crisis or threatening war, however, when her authority is challenged, Elizabeth prefers the security of royal palaces in the London area, as martial ceremonies lose their meaning in times of real battles. Important though the progresses are as Elizabeth's personal exercise of visible power, their open access and the chaos of travel make her vulnerable, as not only well-disposed people come into contact with her. Hence, access to the Queen is ambiguous as her safety is at stake. The power of royal presence, meant to elicit feelings of loyalty, can thus occasionally turn out badly for minor offenders or thoughtless babblers. Almost equally ambiguous is the political message conveyed. The demonstration of royal power can easily be thwarted by unpredictable criticism or rumours spread by her subjects, mostly about her gender and her favourites. Here again, the challenges to the self-created image reveal the limitations of royal authority and its control (Cole 144-169).

The most famous progress leads Elizabeth to Kenilworth Castle in July 1575, where Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, spares neither effort nor money to persuade the Queen – unsuccessfully – to marry him. The courtly entertainments including *The Ladie of the Lake* and Davison's *Proteus* presented in her honour during her 19 days' stay, compiled by George Gascoigne in *The Princely Pleasures* (Orgel, *Masque* 39), turn out to become what Greenblatt calls "the greatest theatrical spectacle of the age" (*Will* 45-46). He conjectures that if 11-year-old Shakespeare saw the Queen amidst these festivities in his neighbourhood "his sense of the transforming power of theatrical illusions" (*Will* 50) may have originated then and there.

The annual Accession Day Tilts on 17 November, proclaimed as an official holy day of the Protestant Church, display royal power to the population as a whole with festivities and secular entertainment in honour of the Virgin Queen replacing the old medieval saints' days and religious plays. Thus the art of festival is made subservient as the monarch's instrument of visible power and rule and proves her monarchy to be "populist by instinct" (Strong, *Art* 19, 154). The public displays take place at the Whitehall tiltyard, a permanent structure offering room for 10-12,000 spectators not only from the court but also from the city who pay the small sum of 12 d as entrance fee. In these tilts, the religiously neutral chivalric code is stressed, exhibiting the queen as the focus of her knights' loyalty to all her subjects, which becomes ever more important from the 1580s on with an ageing

childless Elizabeth threatened by many plots being hatched at home and abroad (Hammer 41-43).

Accession Day Tilts are controlled by Henry Lee, the Queen's chamberlain, in pre-Essex times. During the last four years of Elizabeth's reign, with Essex being banned from the scene, Cecil seems to be in charge of controlling them. He employs the young lawyer John Davies, author of the laudatory and acrostic *Hymnes of Astraea* (1599), who is greatly admired by the Queen and seems to have suggested the programme for the Rainbow portrait (Strong, *Gloriana* 157). Still, it is rewarding to examine the 1595 Accession Day entertainments before Essex's downfall, for they illustrate Elizabeth's increasing problems. Though generally designed to honour the Queen, they turn out to be Essex's barely disguised self-advertising performance. He dares to abuse this biggest public event of the year to arrange his return to royal favour while at the same time showing his frustration with the Queen. This risky strategy reveals his personal dilemma of having to win Elizabeth over to his side, but also her difficulties in this struggle over political power. She can neither afford to lose Essex's military skills nor a too open breach between the Essex and the Cecil factions that might undermine her own authority. This again highlights her fundamental problem of being a female ruler surrounded by male advisers who would always think they knew better. Elizabeth is upset but this goes perhaps unnoticed. The masses are absorbed by spectacle and enjoyment; some might sense a satirical attack on the Cecils while only few courtiers are aware of the political explosiveness of the performance. Nonetheless, the fact that it is possible to upstage the Queen on her special day shows how malleable late Elizabethan public occasions actually are, the manipulation of which for their own purposes also has to do with the courtiers financing much of them with their own money. And it proves them to be quite different from the early Stuart masque, which is state-funded royal propaganda within the closed court environment (Hammer 53-58).

## CONCLUSION

Under Elizabeth, ambiguous power is circulated among her subjects through the discursive practices of punishment, performance, portrait and progress in order to regulate their behaviour, even if her control towards the end of her reign begins to waver.

Public executions are great demonstrations of monarchical power to the common people but can easily slide into carnivalesque entertainments in which the crowd eludes authority's control. Elizabeth as Supreme Governor of the Anglican Church has Catholics executed as traitors. Still, her leniency towards them

often reveals her ambivalence on the issue of how to treat them. Like the scaffold, the theatre is an unstable ideological site and so is its relationship to the crown. Even plays like *Henry V* can be understood in multiple ways by different playgoers during the performance and thus cannot fully be controlled by the state. Henry's power is at times ambiguous just like Elizabeth's, but both seem to work through this paradox. Elizabeth also exploits royal portraits as emblems of her political power. Especially the Rainbow portrait with its ambiguous motto and Elizabeth's ambiguous attire and accessories conveys a daring message of political omnipotence and panoptic control. Her progresses demonstrate royal power also in terms of religious stability, military defense and personal diplomacy. Still, the paradox of access and the occasional ambiguity of the message conveyed unmask her restricted ability to always shape events to her purpose.<sup>3</sup> What seems worth stressing here is that Elizabeth in her reign covers the whole spectrum of punishment and surveillance from bodily torture on the scaffold to control of the mind by means of portraiture, the latter anticipating what Foucault considers to be modes of power, discipline and punishment developed in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Quite in line with Goldberg's claim that "contradiction defines the essence of the discourse of power" (7) all of the above testifies to the ambivalence of Elizabeth's royal authority and image-making. Even though Greenblatt's claim that her power often produces its own subversion in order to contain it is controversial, spectacle combined with paradox is indeed Elizabeth's most potent vehicle of power. While Shakespeare might be fascinated by exploring "the interplay between theatricality and political legitimation" (Montrose, *Playing* 98) in *Henry V*, Elizabeth is proficient in exploiting the very same in her reign. She knows "the power of display" (Tennenhouse 102) and relies on discursive practices – historically and culturally specific in the Foucauldian sense – to maintain and enhance her power, ensure obedience and bind her subjects to her reign and religion.

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3 Interestingly enough, the Earl of Essex plays a crucial role in Elizabeth's late reign in performances of *Henry V*, in the Rainbow portrait, in Accession Day tilts and finally as a victim on the scaffold. She obviously perceives him as a dangerous rival aspiring to power thus making manifest her problems on account of her gender in a profoundly patriarchal society but also her authority to dispose of him.

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## **Izkazovanje moči v elizabetinski Angliji**

Namen članka je s pomočjo Foucaultovega in novega historicizma raziskati performativno moč kraljice Elizabete I. kot se kaže pri uporabi na odru in izven njega, v kraljičinih portretih ter procesijah.

**Ključne besede:** Elizabeta I., spektakel, mnogopomenskost oblasti, Foucault, Shakespeare, *Henry V*.