

The image features five light purple circles arranged in two rows. The top row contains three circles, and the bottom row contains two circles. The text is centered over the top row of circles.

**“Arm, arm, my name!”**

**October 30, 2003**

# Unhappy language



- Austin proposes “looking at and classifying types of case in which something goes wrong and the act – marrying, betting, bequeathing, christening, or what not – is therefore at least to some extent a failure: the utterance is then, we may say, unhappy.”



## Act 3, scene 2: a hard case

- SALISBURY.

For all the Welshmen, hearing thou wert dead,  
Are gone to Bullingbrook, dispersed and fled.

...

- RICHARD.

I had forgot myself. Am I not king?  
Awake, thou coward majesty, thou sleepest.  
Is not the king's name twenty thousand names?  
Arm, arm, my name! A puny subject strikes  
At thy great glory.

(III. 2. 73-86)

# Austin on speech acts: a review

- “The uttering of the words is... far from being usually, even if it is ever, the sole thing necessary if the act is to be deemed to have been performed. Speaking generally, it is always necessary that the *circumstances* in which the words are uttered should be, in some way, or ways, *appropriate*, and it is very commonly necessary that either the speaker himself or other persons should *also* perform certain *other* actions, whether ‘physical’ or ‘mental’ actions or even acts of uttering further words. ... Surely the words must be spoken ‘seriously’ and so as to be taken ‘seriously’... I must not be joking, for example, nor writing a poem.”

*(How to Do Things with Words, p. 8)*



# In more confident times

RICHARD. Not all the water in the rough rude sea  
Can wash the balm off from an anointed king.  
The breath of worldly men cannot depose  
The deputy elected by the Lord.  
For every man that Bullingbrook hath pressed  
To lift shrewd steel against our golden crown  
God for His Richard hath in heavenly pay  
A glorious angel.

(III. 2. 54-61)

# Which Richard?



RICHARD. For God's sake let us sit upon the ground  
And tell sad stories of the death of kings....

Cover your heads, and mock not flesh and blood  
With solemn reverence. Throw away respect,  
Tradition, form and ceremonious duty,  
For you have but mistook me all this while.

I live with bread like you, feel want,  
Taste grief, need friends. Subjected thus,  
How can you say to me I am a king?

(III. 2. 155-6, 171-7)



# Such stuff as kings are made of

- “Arm, arm, my name!” – an “unhappy” speech act? Misaddressed or simply void?
- The speech acts that create some men as kings: divine speech act (“election”) or human mistake?
- The power of royal speech, once deserted by its borrowed troops: kingly language in the pure state?
- Poetry or insanity? (“counsel is but vain”)
- Nearness to death (as if Richard must be either immortal or a dead letter)



For do we must what force will have us do.

(III. 3. 206)





# Language as epitaph

We'll make foul weather with despisèd tears:  
Our sighs and they shall lodge the summer corn  
And make a dearth in this revolting land.  
Or shall we play the wantons with our woes  
And make some pretty match with shedding tears,  
As thus to drop them still upon one place  
Till they have fretted us a pair of graves  
Within the earth, and therein laid? There lies  
Two kinsmen digged their graves with weeping eyes.  
Would not this ill do well? (III. 3. 161-70)

# Self-erasing speech

BULLINGBROOK.

Are you contented to resign the crown?

RICHARD.

Aye – no. No – aye, for I must nothing be,  
Therefore no ‘no,’ for I resign to thee.

Now, mark me how I will undo myself.

(IV.1.199-202)



What's left?

RICHARD. Nay, if I turn mine eyes upon myself  
I find myself a traitor with the rest...

Alack the heavy day

That I have worn so many winters out

And know not now what name to call myself.

O that I were a mockery king of snow

Standing before the sun of Bullingbrook

To melt myself away in water drops.



- Richard's language becomes not merely "void" (empty, without application), but a force with no other object than itself
- Language with executive function— the breath of kings—turns into poetry, language that feeds on itself
- A linguistic auto-immune disorder?



Nobody, everybody, anybody

RICHARD. I have been studying how I may  
compare

This prison where I live unto the world...

Thus play I in one person many people,

And none contented. Sometimes am I king,

And treasons make me wish myself a  
beggar,

And so I am.

(V. 5.1-34)



# Richard's hypotheses

- “The two bodies are one”: proven false.
- The political body deserts the physical body:
  - Treason committed by all, even Richard
- The physical body (the mortal part of the king) is left speaking the (ineffective) language of hollow performatives
- This language turns back on itself, in a suicidal pattern of self-erasing meanings



# An accident waiting to happen?

Down, down I come like glistering Phaeton,  
Wanting the manage of unruly jades. (III.3.178-9)

Mount, mount, my soul. Thy seat is up on high  
Whilst my gross flesh sinks downward, here to die.  
(V.5.111)

-- the culmination of a long and painful divorce between  
the king's two bodies.