

Explore the view that, despite his tragic flaws, Richard is 'ultimately magnificent'.

Remember to include in your answer relevant comment on Shakespeare's dramatic methods [25 marks]

It is understandable why some people might feel that despite his tragic flaws Richard is 'ultimately magnificent.' This is due to his physical appearance where he is seen wearing very extravagant clothing in productions such as the BBC's 'Hollow Crown'. He is always seen wearing white which portrays him as a majestic and innocent character. Additionally, his unwavering belief in his own greatness re-enforces his divine authority and reminds the audience of his power and great status as King which make him seem 'Ultimately magnificent' However, it could be argued that despite this, his flaws ultimately make him seem weak and pathetic rather than magnificent. This is due to his callous actions such as his choice to take Gaunt's "Plate, his goods, his money and his lands" which make him seem evil and as the arbiter of justice, we expect him to be more fair in his actions. Additionally, his self-pity makes him seem childish and overrules any magnificent qualities seen by the audience.

It could be argued that there is something ultimately magnificent about Richard's unwavering belief in his own greatness. The audience can see this in Act 1 Scene 1 where he claims he shall remain impartial towards Bullingbrook's and Mowbray's trial due to the 'unstopping firmness of my upright soul' Here, Shakespeare has used personification to describe Richard's soul. This reflects Richard's status as King which allows him to shift forms between two bodies: body human and body politic, in the same way his soul is able to possess two forms. This reminds the audience of Richards majestic and God-like status which make us see him as magnificent due to his power and his divine right as 'deputy elected by the Lord' thus making him seem 'ultimately magnificent.' Additionally, the alliteration used in the words 'unstopping' and 'upright' show that Richard's confidence in himself is definite and makes the audience see him as a confident King who knows how to execute his duties efficiently. However, some may argue that Richard's unwavering belief in himself ultimately leads to his downfall and therefore, cannot be seen as magnificent. This is shown in Richard's tendency to blame others throughout the play, most significantly in Act 3 Scene 2 where he wrongly accuses Bushy and Green of betraying him and being 'villains, vipers damned without redemption' This will seem un-just to the audience as we know that it is Richard's own wrong-doings such as stealing Gaunt possessions which have ultimately led to the threat that he now faces in England. Shakespeare's choice to use a list, highlights the fact that Richard is completely delusional and is blinded by his belief in his own greatness that he seeks to put the blame on anyone but himself. It could also be seen as ironic, as at the end of the play Richards own sins and wrong-doing are not forgiven by his subjects, in the same way that he wishes Bushy's and Green's souls to have no redemption. Perhaps if Richard had accepted his own mistakes and corrected them he could have avoided his downfall, therefore his unwavering belief in his own greatness is a fatal error and thus he cannot be seen as 'ultimately magnificent'

It is also arguable that Richard isn't magnificent, instead he is pathetic due to his self- pity and his inaction. This is most prominent in Act 3 Scene 2 where he asks his few remaining followers to 'sit upon the ground' This is a huge contrast as the audience can now see that Richard is as low as the ground in terms of status, whereas before he makes it seem as if his 'salute' to the Earth is a huge favour on his behalf. The audience can see the change in Richard's attitude and his inability to act upon his current situation. Sitting down makes it seem as if Richard has given up whereas we know that Bullingbrook is fighting. Because of this, we can argue that Richard deserves to be usurped as Bullingbrook is taking

action whereas Richard has given up and is simply pitying himself therefore he cannot be seen as 'ultimately magnificent.' However, even though Richard continues to pity himself, he gains poetic skill and influence thus increasing his magnificence. This is shown in Act 4 Scene 1 where he similarly infers that his status is now very low and he has fallen from power. However, this time he uses a more complex simile of a well where he claims 'that bucket down and full of tears am I, drinking my griefs, whilst you mount up on high.' Shakespeare has used this simile as an illustration for the whole play, as one person gains power and status someone else falls from grace. However, it also shows that Richard is full of grief and sadness which again shows that he is extremely self-pitying. The simile also infers that Bullingbrook is empty which could be a subtle dig from Richard showing that he has not yet completely given up his desire and will to be king. So even though Richard continues to pity himself and his fate, his poetic skill and insight allow us to see him as 'ultimately magnificent' as he is able to reflect upon his situation with very sophisticated insight.

It could also be argued that the admiration of Richard's supporters allows us to view him as 'ultimately magnificent' in spite of his flaws. During the play we see a whole host of loyal followers however, very few remain when Richard is usurped. Among these last followers, the Groom in Act 5 Scene 5 is one that sticks out for the audience. This is because he is one of the last people Richard sees before he is killed. The Groom has gone on a pilgrimage simply to see his 'royal masters face' This makes the audience view Richard as magnificent as we can see that he has affected people in such a way that, merely the sight of his face will be enough to satisfy the Groom. I also think Shakespeare has cleverly placed this encounter right after Richard's one and only soliloquy. This is very powerful as the audience are already in awe due to our first insight into Richard's most clever, intimate and sophisticated thoughts. Therefore, this makes the meeting with the groom even more majestic and memorable for the audience. However, it could also be argued that even though Richard has loyal followers, at the beginning of the play we saw evidence of people who had been greatly affected by Richards incompetence and most importantly so had the country. This was shown by Gaunt in Act 2 scene 1 who claimed that due to Richard, England had been contaminated with 'inky blots.' The inky blots show Richard's incapability to rule and also undermines any flattery we hear from his loyal followers as we can see that his incompetence has left long lasting effects on England. Therefore, it is impossible to label Richard as 'ultimately magnificent'

It is also arguable that there is something magnificent about the way in which Richard hold his opponents to account for their actions. We first see this when he hears about Bullingbrook's treasons and claims that they 'will sit blushing in his face.' Shakespeare has used personification to show Richard's power and that even though his crown is under threat, he is still able to exercise his power and continue to carry out justice which is his main role as King. This is further developed when Bullingbrook asks his subjects to 'convey' Richard to the tower. Richard replies by saying to his former subjects 'Convey? Conveyers are you all.' Here, Shakespeare has used a pun with the word convey as it has the meaning of 'escort' but also 'steal' This shows that Richard believes that what the noble men have done is treason and is holding them to account for what was seen in the Elizabethan times as a deadly sin and act of treason. Therefore, these examples of Richards ability to hold his opponents to account make him seem magnificent as he is able to remain dignified, powerful and confident despite his very drastic downfall. However, his use of a pun in such a tragic moment may also be seen as foolish as Richard is still not able to take the situation seriously and is simply using words to divert the attention from his wrong-doings therefore his magnificence in this aspect could be questioned.

In conclusion, I think that it is almost impossible to label Richard as magnificent as his fatal flaws are not balanced by any of his good attributes. Even though, he is extremely clever with his words specifically towards the end, he uses this as a device to pity himself and put blame on those who don't deserve it. His confidence is ultimately used by Shakespeare as a foundation for his downfall as it doesn't allow him to see his wrong doings due to his belief that 'not all the water in the rough rude sea can wash the balm of from an anointed King' His belief in his divine right allows him to stand up to his opponents however, this is out-weighed by the criticism that Richard has received in the first few scenes of the play. Therefore, it seems as if Richards own actions have brought him to his downfall therefore we cannot see him as 'ultimately magnificent'