Richard is still magnificent in spite of his tragic flaws. How far do you agree?

Richard II could be seen as magnificent in many ways: he demonstrates a sophisticated use of poetic language, which when coupled with many productions' use of costume and props, creates a sense of his magnificence both physically and linguistically. He also retains his belief in his divine right and holds the play's other characters to account for removing it – this, too, could be seen as a sign of impressive boldness. However, some critics argue that Richard's magnificence is mitigated by his fatal flaws: his foolishly unwavering self-belief prevents him from acknowledging his real vulnerability; his self-pity keeps him from taking action to oppose Bullingbrook, and the idiotic decisions he makes early on in the play overshadow his later eloquence.

Throughout the play, Richard displays a complete certainty in his own divine right, which he holds on to even as he is dying. In Act 5, as he is being murdered, Richard accuses his killer that he has "with the king's blood stained the king's own land". This statement, made in Richard's final speech, illustrates as much certainty of Richard's divine right as the line "we were not born to sue but to command" did in the first act. There is something magnificent about how Richard's belief in his divine right remains unchanged throughout the play, despite being almost completely usurped, and made powerless. Richard also shows magnificence in his certainty that Bullingbrook's rebellion is "dangerous treason" and that "God omnipotent is mustering in his clouds on our behalf". Although this could be seen as foolish, Richard's religious self-certainty is admirable, and would have been recognised by Shakespearian audiences as being correct – they knew full well that Henry Bullingbrook's reign would be violent and troubled. In fact, Richard's wish for "armies of pestilence to strike your children yet unborn and unbegot" would be proved true by a later play in Shakespeare's quartet – Bullingbrook's unborn son grows up to be a problem for him in later plays. Richard's statement would have been recognised as curse that came true and this asserts his divine right to a Shakespearian audience, so making Richard's unshaking acceptance of it magnificent.

However, Richard's refusal to listen, change, or compromise is as much a part of his downfall as it is a sign of his magnificence. The "unstooping firmness of mu upright soul" which Richard boasts of in the first act is a large part of what brings him down – had he been able to see himself as human and capable of mistakes earlier on in the play he could have prevented his downfall. It's the hubris that made him king which brings him down, as according with Aristotle's tragic structure. When Richard returns to England he says "weeping, smiling greet I thee, my earth" which is difficult to read as anything other than hyperbolic and ridiculous. His use of the respectful pronoun "thee" to speak to the soil comes across an unnecessary – Shakespeare makes sure the audience knows this by having Tichard's supporters laugh at him – he asks them to "mock not my senseless conjugation". It is Richard's self-certainty that leads to another of his tragic flaws – self-pity. While Richard's determination that he is right is

to some extent admirable, the despair and fragility he shows after losing it distracts from any magnificence. It is difficult for any audience to view a monarch as magnificent while he urges his followers to "sit on the ground and tell sad stories of the deaths of kings" This line, and the speech that follows it, is certainly poetic – his metaphor of death breaking flesh thought to be "brass impregnable" with just "a little pin" is moving, and well-constructed, but not what is expected of a deposed monarch. Richard's determination to use verbal magnificence to do harm to Bullingbrook is ridiculous. Shakespeare leaves the audience frustrated with Richard – moved, maybe, but wanting action, not just faith in God and self-pity.

While Richard's poetic language can come across as a short substitute for action, there is something magnificent about it. As Richard falls from power and into his tragic fate, his poetic powers increase. The metaphor o the sun for the monarch recurs throughout the play, but it reaches its most poetic when Richard says "down, down I come like glistering Phaeton wanting the manage of unruly Jades". This movement from ordinary sun imagery to use of the classical Gods illustrated how as Richard falls out of power and further into himself he becomes more poetic and scholarly. To a Shakespearian audience (who would have known the story of Phaeton driving the sun and being knocked out of the sky) this would have been especially moving – they would have seen it as an example of poetic magnificence. Shakespeare also gives Richard poetic magnificence when he has him compare the interlocked fortunes of himself and Bullingbrook to "a deep well that owes two buckets" where Bullingbrook if "the emptier ever dancing in the air" and Richard is "down, unseen, and full of water". This metaphor contains strong imagery of the well which makes the audience and Bullingbrook see how Bullingbrook's rise is pushing Richard down. This metaphor also helps to shift sympathy from Bullingbrook to Richard. The idea of Bullingbrook "dancing in the air" implies that he is every bit as childish as Richard in the play's opening, while Richard comes across as wiser and more certain – the phrase "full of tears" gives an impression of someone knowing and certain. Richard's careful use of poetic language is not only admirable in itself, but also questions Bullingbrook's suitability for the throne, casting Richard as magnificent.

However, Richard's magnificence and capacity for reign is overshadowed throughout the play by his bad decisions at its opening. Richard's biblical accusations that his betrayers are "thrice worse than Judas" are mitigated by the fact that Richard himself has been accused of a similar betrayal in killing his uncle – this, too, is associated with biblical murder. We are told that Gloucester's blood spilt "like sacrificing Abel's". Shakespeare's use of biblical imagery links Gloucester's death with Richard's deposition to ensure that the audience remembers Richard is not innocent. While Bulling brook may have defied God in usurping Richard, Richard himself crossed holy lines several times. An example of this is when he seizes Bullingbrook's inheritance – Richard is warned that he himself is only king "by fair sequence and succession" but chooses to ignore what would have at the time been seen as the natural order. In doing this Richard is warned that he will be hurt

with elemental imagery of England already being "bound in" with a "sea of shame". Shakespeare extends these elemental metaphors, turning them into physical examples of pathetic fallacy 0 eventually it will be the Irish sea which prevents Richard from returning home to claim the crown. Richard's mistakes and the way fate seems to be making him pay for them makes it difficult to view him as magnificent.

Overall, we cannot view Richard as ultimately magnificent, although his poetic language and certainty in his own divinity make him admirable. His fatal flaws overcome his belief in his "great glory" and though we have a certain amount of sympathy for Richard as someone who "tastes grief, needs friends", this does not equal magnificence. His fatal flaws make him seem like an incompetent and totalitarian ruler, who may not deserve death, but shouldn't be monarch either. Although Richard recognises his fatal flaws and becomes more admirable throughout the play, he can't be considered ultimately magnificent.