# King Richard III Study Guide

## King Richard III by William Shakespeare

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# Introduction

Although *Richard III* was first published in 1597, most scholars believe that this play about the rise and fall of a wicked king was written several years earlier, probably in 1592 or 1593, and first performed shortly afterward. Evidence shows that it was popular from the beginning: The Elizabethan actor Richard Burbage achieved distinction playing Richard III, and the character's final line—"A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!"—was already famous by the early 1600s when Richard Corbet (1618 or 1621) wrote a poem about the play. It is also believed that Elizabethan audiences would have appreciated the patriotic speech given by Richmond (who becomes King Henry VII) in the last act.

Early critical assessment of *Richard III* was mixed. Sir William Cornwallis (1600) and William Winstanley (1660), for example, objected to Shakespeare's portrayal of King Richard as "a monster." In contrast, poet John Milton (1650) argued that the character in the play was "true to his historical counterpart." Today, most scholars contend that Shakespeare based the drama and its characters primarily on Edward Hall's *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre and Yorke* (1548)—a work that relies both on fact and fiction to tell the history of King

Richard III's family (the House of York) and its long power struggle (known as the Wars of the Roses) with King Henry VII's family (the House of Lancaster). A secondary source was probably Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (1587). In turn, each of these works was based upon Thomas More's witty and ironic *Historie of King Richard the Thirde* (published around 1513). In this account, More used a dry, almost humorous tone to describe Richard as hunchbacked, tyrannical, and evil.

Shakespeare's play varies from its sources in numerous ways but two are of particular importance: First, although Shakespeare borrowed Thomas More's ironic narrative tone, he placed it in Richard's mouth, so that the character becomes a complex, semi-comical villain who laughs at himself and others even while he is plotting to do harm.

*Richard III* also functions as a sequel to Shakespeare's trilogy of *plays—Henry VI,* parts one, two, and three which brings us to the second of Shakespeare's significant modifications: In *Richard III,* Margaret, widow to Henry VI (a Lancastrian king who was murdered by Richard in *Henry VI,* part three), remains in England where the play is set rather than sailing home to France as she did according to history. Onstage, Margaret voices her opinion on the action in the play, and predicts doom and misery as her revenge on Richard and his supporters. In doing so, Margaret serves the same function in the drama as a chorus would. Individual choric figures or a chorus are sometimes used to describe events which occur before the beginning of the play or to comment on the action of the playas it unfolds.

Richard's complexity and Margaret's presence have generated much critical discussion regarding the play's themes of sin and divine retribution. Richard's coronation comes toward the end of a period of bloody civil strife known as the Wars of the Roses, and

some critics argue that his wickedness functions as divine punishment against the warring parties, as well as a method of cleansing England for a new era of peace. Other critics have focused on Margaret and her importance to the development of the play, as her curses on each guilty character are fulfilled.

# Plot Summary

The Wars of the Roses are for the moment over, the Y orkists have beaten the Lancastrians, and Yorkist Edward IV is now king of England. But his youngest brother, Richard of Gloucester (self-described as deformed, unfit for peace, "subtle, false, and treacherous"), decides to cause trouble. He convinces the king that their brother, George, Duke of Clarence, is dangerous and should be jailed. Richard then tells Clarence that Queen Elizabeth, Edward IV's wife, is responsible for his imprisonment. When he hears that the king is seriously ill, Richard plots to have Clarence killed so that there will be fewer encumbrances to his own succession to Edward's throne. Next, he encounters Lady Anne (widow of Henry VI's son Prince Edward whom Richard and his brothers killed) mourning over the coffin of her father-in-law, Henry VI (whom Richard murdered). At first Anne curses Richard, but eventually he charms her into accepting his ring.

Later, Richard publicly accuses Queen Elizabeth of having turned the king against not only Clarence, but against himself and Lord Hastings. Margaret (widow of Henry VI) appears and curses Richard. In prison, Clarence is stabbed by Richard's hired assassins and drowned in a cask of malmsey wine.

# Act 1, Scene 1

## Act 1, Scene 1 Summary

Richard of Gloucester, King Edward IV's brother, recites a monologue to himself in which he conveys that peace has come to England. However, he is not satisfied. He was born misshapen, and he is so ugly that dogs bark at him as he limps by. Since he is too deformed to be worthy of love, he has resolved to be a villain. He has laid a plot to set his two brothers, King Edward and Clarence, against each other. Richard invented a prophecy, which he told Edward, that "G of Edward's heirs" would murder him. Richard is confident Edward will interpret the prophecy to mean the Duke of Clarence, whose given name is George, is going to kill him.

Clarence enters, being led to the tower by guards. Richard feigns ignorance and concern and asks why Clarence is guarded. Clarence explains that King Edward is convinced that Clarence is planning to kill him because of some prophecy. Richard thinks Edward is being ruled by his wife; otherwise, he would not do such a thing, and he says that neither of them is safe from her. Clarence must be led away and Richard tells him not to worry for his imprisonment will not be long. Clarence is led away and Richard reveals that he plans to ensure that Clarence is killed.

Lord Hastings enters, who has just recently been released from the tower. He tells Richard that the king is in very bad health. Richard pretends to be saddened by the news and tells Hastings he will go to see the king. When Hastings leaves, Richard reveals his joy at Edward's illness. However, he needs Edward to stay alive long enough to have Clarence executed. He then plans to marry Anne Neville, who is the widow of Edward, Prince of Wales.

## Act 1, Scene 1 Analysis

The play opens with a soliloquy by Richard, who refers to recent events in England's history. The War of the Roses, which was a contest for the throne of England, has finally ended, and now there is peace. The House of York, which Richard and his brothers belong to, defeated the House of Lancaster, and Edward is the new king.

Richard's character is revealed in his opening soliloquy: he wishes to be a villain, a goal he begins trying to achieve immediately. The reason he gives for wanting to create chaos in England is his deformity. He says he cannot be loved because of his looks, and thus, wants to cause others pain. His first task is to get his brother Clarence executed by his other brother, King Edward. Richard achieves his goal merely by inventing a prophecy that suggests Clarence might kill Edward. The irony is that the prophecy is true. Someone with the initial "G" will bring Edward and his heirs down, but it is not *George* Duke of Clarence, but Richard Duke of *Gloucester*.

Although Richard is an evil character, as will become more apparent as the play progresses, it could also be argued that the characters he harms deserve what they get from him. King Edward is a good example of this idea, since he executes his own brother Clarence simply because of a fake prophecy. Edward did not have to listen to Richard or react the way he did. Edward's punishment of Clarence was, for the most part, his own doing, and not Richard's fault.

Richard's great acting ability is also apparent in this scene. When by himself he admits his plans for getting Clarence executed, showing no concern that his brother is innocent of any wrongdoing. However, when he meets Clarence in the street he is convincingly concerned and seems to promise Clarence that he will help him get out of prison soon when he says, "your imprisonment shall not be for long." However, after Clarence is led away we learn that his imprisonment will not be long because Clarence is scheming to have him killed as quickly as possible. Richard's talent for altering his personality is a key element that will be seen throughout the play.

# Act 1, Scene 2

## Act 1, Scene 2 Summary

King Henry VI and his son Edward of Wales have been killed. Lady Anne mourns their deaths because she was married to Edward. Anne curses Richard for having killed her husband and father-in-law. She hopes that if Richard marries, his wife will be as miserable as Anne is now, and hopes their children will be deformed and hideous.

When Anne is finished, she orders that the coffin be taken to be buried. Richard enters and commands that the coffin be put down. Anne is furious that he would dare try to interfere in Henry's burial. She says that he killed Henry's physical body, but even though he is the devil, cannot have his soul. Anne berates Richard for his evil actions, but he defends himself, saying that he was not the cause of Henry and Edward's deaths, her beauty was the cause. Richard claims to have killed the men out of love for her. He gives her his sword, bares his chest and says that if she cannot love him to kill him now with his sword. She lifts the sword and points it at his chest. He tells her not to hesitate, and admits killing both men but attributes the action to her "heavenly face." Anne drops the sword, refusing to be Richard's executioner. Richard offers to kill himself for her. She replies that she already told him to do so. Richard asks her to say it again, because before she was in a rage. Anne does not repeat the request, and Richard gives her his ring, which she accepts.

At Richard's request, Anne leaves to stay at Crosby House, one of Richard's properties. He promises her that he will see to Henry's burial at Chertsey monastery, where he will weep over the grave in repentance for what he has done. Anne is impressed with his remorse. However, once she leaves, Richard orders the body taken to Whitefriars instead.

He then gloats over his victory of Anne. He was able to win her over despite his having killed her husband and father-in-law, despite her hate of him not one minute earlier, and despite the evidence of his crime, Henry's body, lying beside them. "Was ever woman in this humor wooed? / Was ever woman in this humor won?" he asks himself.

## Act 1, Scene 2 Analysis

This scene is often confusing to readers because Anne laments the death of the King. However, it is not King Edward, who we saw was ill in the previous scene, but her father-in-law, King Henry who was defeated by Richard and his brothers, for whom she laments. As mentioned before, the events of the play occur after a long struggle for the throne between the Lancaster and York families. Henry was a Lancaster, and Anne was married to his son Edward (a different person than the current king), who was also killed by Richard and his brothers. It must also be remembered that although the events of the

play seem to occur one after another, these events in history cover about fourteen years.

Anne rages at Richard because he is responsible for the deaths of her husband and father-in-law—a fact the reader was not previously aware of. Up until this point Richard's treachery had only involved scheming. Now we know he has in fact killed. That Anne gives into Richard is confounding, since she obviously knows his evil character. She lets herself be drawn in by his flattery of her, and agrees to move to his house and wait for him. Like the other characters Richard harms, there is a sense that Anne deserves what she gets for having let herself be sweet-talked by someone she herself thinks of as the devil. Her curse on any future wife Richard may have is ironic since that will soon be she, and she has cursed herself.

# Act 1, Scene 3

## Act 1, Scene 3 Summary

At the royal court, Queen Elizabeth worries about her husband's illness. She dreads what will happen to her son if King Edward dies because Richard will be made his guardian until he comes of age to rule, and that worries her. Lord Buckingham and Lord Earl, having just visited the king, report that he is in good spirits and has sent for Richard, Lord Hastings, and Elizabeth's brothers, between whom he wants to make peace, since there have been hostilities between them.

Richard enters, angry because those around him lie about him behind his back and ruin his reputation with the king. He claims he has never said anything bad about Elizabeth or her brothers. He then accuses Elizabeth of having Clarence and Lord Hastings imprisoned and wanting King Edward dead. Elizabeth defends herself, and the two continue to argue.

The former queen, Queen Margaret enters unnoticed. She speaks to herself calling Richard a devil and cursing him for killing her husband and son. She finally shows herself and denounces Richard for the murders he committed. Though everyone in the room had been fighting against Richard when Margaret entered, they now turn on Margaret because she killed Rutland, the Duke of York's son. She accuses Richard and Elizabeth of taking what was hers, and curses everyone in the room. She says that the current Prince of Wales will die young as hers did, curses the new queen, Elizabeth, to outlive her glory as Margaret is doing now and asks God that Rivers, Dorset and Lord Hastings will meet with some accident that will cause them to die young. She curses Richard to believe that those who are his friends are traitors and that those who are traitors are his friends, and to lose by blood what he has won by blood. The only person Margaret wishes well is Lord Buckingham because he has not harmed her family. She warns him to beware of Richard. When Margaret leaves, Richard says he cannot blame her for her anger because she has gone through so much, and repents any wrong he has done to her.

King Edward calls for Elizabeth and the other lords. They go to see him. Richard hangs behind to speak to his two assassins, who are ordered to kill Clarence. Richard exults that he has been able to make others believe that the queen has caused Clarence's death, and says that he hides his villainy in Christian behavior.

## Act 1, Scene 3 Analysis

At the beginning of the scene, it seems that Elizabeth is on to Richard. She worries what will happen if Richard is given power over her son. She knows Richard does not like her or her family. Her conversation with Rivers and Grey might have led to some kind of confrontation with Richard having to defend his self. However, when Richard

enters he begins by accusing others present of slandering him to the king, and plotting against the king- the very things of which he should be accused. He even accuses Elizabeth of causing Clarence's imprisonment, for which we know Richard is responsible. His accusations cause the other characters to have to defend themselves rather than accuse Richard of anything. The opening of the scene is another example of Richard's brilliant villainy, and a beautifully display of the magnitude of his hypocrisy.

Margaret enters as Rivers, Grey and Elizabeth are all arguing with Richard. She is surprised, as the reader might be that when she steps in and condemns Richard for his actions they all turn against her. Margaret causes the other characters to forget their differences, and by the end of the scene, Richard and the others are having a friendly conversation. When Margaret calls Richard a villain, and tries to warn the others about him, they all think she is mad, when earlier it seemed they held the same opinion of Richard.

Margaret curses Elizabeth, Rivers and Grey for their parts in the destruction of her family, and for turning on her rather than Richard. Her curses should cause foreboding in the reader, because prophecy is often fulfilled in Shakespeare plays. The curses take the form of biblical justice as described in Exodus 21:24: "eye for eye, tooth for tooth." Except in this case it is a son for a son, a kingdom for a kingdom. Margaret hopes that Elizabeth loses her son, husband and kingdom as Margaret did, and condemns Rivers and Grey to die because of the deaths they caused.

# Act 1, Scene 4

## Act 1, Scene 4 Summary

Clarence, imprisoned, tells the prison-keeper of a bad dream he had in the night. In it, he and Richard were on a ship and talked of all of the things that had happened to them during the War between the Yorks and the Lancasters. Then Richard seemed to fall, and when Clarence tried to steady him, Richard pushed him overboard. Clarence drowned and went to hell where he saw Edward, King Henry VI's son, whom he and Richard killed, and someone else whose face he cannot see, but whom he killed in Tewkesbury. Clarence laments his actions, and knows that he will go to hell for the deeds he has committed; but Clarence is most disappointed that he did those things for his brother Edward, who has repaid him by having him thrown in prison. He hopes that his death will pay for his wrongs, and his wife and children will be left unharmed.

Clarence sleeps and Richard's assassins enter. They discuss if it would be cowardly to kill him in his sleep. One of the assassins begins to have doubts. He does not want to go to hell for killing Clarence. The other assassin reminds him of the reward promised by Richard. The first assassin resolves to disregard his conscience and carry out the murder. Clarence awakes and knows why the assassins are there. He tries to persuade them not to murder him. They tell Clarence that the king has ordered his death. Clarence asks the men to go to his brother Richard, who will pay them more to save Clarence than Edward has paid to have him killed. The assassins tell Clarence that Richard paid to have him killed. Clarence cannot believe that of Richard. Clarence's pleading convinces the assassin who was earlier having second thoughts, but not the other. The other one murders Clarence, stabbing him and dunking him in a wine barrel, while the first stands by. When it is over, the assassin who did not take part in the murder tells the other to inform Richard that he did not have any part in the murder, and is sorry Clarence is dead.

## Act 1, Scene 4 Analysis

Clarence's dream at the beginning of the scene foreshadows his eventual drowning at the end of the scene caused by his brother Richard. It is a form of prophecy similar to Margaret's curses in the previous scene. However, despite his dream, Clarence still does not suspect Richard, and does not even believe the assassins when they tell him Richard has paid for his murder. Similarly, Elizabeth and the others ignore Margaret's warnings. The failure to heed such warnings is part of the downfall of the other characters.

The imagery in the dream juxtaposes death and wealth. Although the supernatural is present in the play, as seen above, Christian themes are also prevalent. The imagery of Clarence's dream shows dead men at the bottom of the ocean surrounded by wealth: gold and gems. It is a reminder that wealth is useless once one dies. In the Christian

tradition, you can take nothing with you into heaven. This imagery suggests that although Richard may gain the power and wealth he strives for, it will all be for nothing in the end since he got those things by villainous means. This theme is carried on later in the scene when one of the assassins chooses to "save [his] soul" rather than kill Clarence for the gold promised by Richard.

We see that Richard was right when he warned the assassins not to speak with Clarence because he might convince them to spare his life. Clarence obviously shares Richard's persuasive abilities. He is able to persuade one assassin, but not the other. Though he has talent with language, it does not match Richard's. When informed of Richard's treachery, Clarence does not believe it, and defends his brother against the accusation. Richard's ability to persuade Clarence of his love for him, while at the same time plotting his death, illustrates Richard's superior talents.

Before killing Clarence, one of the assassins is affected by his conscience. The episode is made comical by the assassins calling the conscience the "devil" and renouncing it from their minds. The second assassin complains about the conscience because it does not let one steal or swear, or sleep with another man's wife, and laments that once it made him return some money he "found." The presence of comedy in an otherwise gruesome scene, paired with the assassin's misgivings suggests that Clarence might be spared. However, one assassin's interest in the reward offered is too much for Clarence's persuasive abilities, and he is drowned as foretold by his dream.

# Act 2, Scene 1

## Act 2, Scene 1 Summary

King Edward speaks with Queen Elizabeth, Lord Rivers, Lord Hastings, Lord Dorset and Lord Buckingham. He has Rivers and Hastings swear allegiance to each other and forget their past quarrels. He does the same with Dorset, Hastings, Buckingham and the Queen. Richard enters and apologizes if he has ever offended any of them, and hopes no one holds grudges against him because he holds none.

The Queen suggests that since they have all been reconciled to each other, the king should reconcile himself with Clarence. Everyone is shocked when Richard announces that Clarence is dead. The king is confused because he had ordered that Clarence not be killed. Richard claims that the message was not delivered and Clarence was killed because of the king's initial order. The king laments Clarence's death and is angry that no one tried to defend Clarence and convince the king he was wrong. He remembers all of Clarence's faithfulness to him in the past.

The king returns to his bedroom with the queen and some of the lords. Richard tells the remaining lords that the brothers of the queen urged the king to have Clarence killed and are thus responsible for his death.

## Act 2, Scene 1 Analysis

In this scene, Richard actually allows his duplicity to be seen by some of the characters. When he first enters, he delivers a speech in which he expresses his wish to be at peace with everyone present, and apologizes for any offence he may have committed. However, after the king, the queen and her brothers leave the room after the announcement of Clarence's death, Richard immediately accuses the other men of being responsible for Clarence's death. However, Richard's about-face seems to go un-noticed by the lords present.

The king's speech when he learns of Clarence's death is touching, and highlights the destructiveness of infighting. The king's order to kill Clarence was a result of his fear of losing power, and was meant to eliminate such a threat. The king recognized his error and ordered his previous command reversed. He called together the disputing lords to resolve their differences so they might not make such a mistake in the future. The king's ability to recognize his error and his instinct that his court needs unity rather than division shows that he possesses good judgment, although he initially listened to Richard's false prophecy and acted rashly. Once the king learns of Clarence's death, he blames himself, but is angry that no one defended his brother when he was acting so irrationally.

# Act 2, Scene 2

## Act 2, Scene 2 Summary

The Duchess of York enters with Clarence's now orphaned son and daughter. They ask her, their grandmother, if their father is dead, which she initially denies. However, they know she is lying because she weeps for his death and because Richard already told them of it. The boy says Richard told him the king ordered Clarence's death, and the queen urged him to it. Richard then wept and told the boy to think of him as a father. The Duchess is ashamed that she raised a son such as Richard, but says that he did not get his deceit from her. The boy asks if she thinks Richard was lying to him. The Duchess tells him yes, but he cannot believe it.

Queen Elizabeth enters, lamenting King Edward's death. The Duchess says her sorrow is greater than any other is because she has already lost a husband, as well as two sons now. They and the children continue their lamentations, and Dorset and Rivers enter telling the queen not to offend God by questioning his actions on earth. They advise her to crown her young son king and take comfort in his life. Richard enters with Buckingham, Derby, Hastings and Radcliffe. Buckingham suggests that they should all try to maintain the oaths of friendship they swore when the king was alive. He also agrees that the king's son should be brought back from Ludlow and crowned. Everyone agrees, and all will go in the group to bring him back. All but Richard and Buckingham leave. Buckingham says that they should not remain behind because they need to do their best to separate the queen's brothers from the young prince, as Richard suggested. Richard says that he "as a child" will follow Buckingham's directions.

## Act 2, Scene 2 Analysis

This scene reveals the depths of Richard's villainy, as he has no qualms about deceiving children: weeping and kissing Clarence's son whose father he has had killed. Again, like all the others, when the boy is told Richard is a liar, he does not believe it.

So far, Richard's mother, the Duchess of York, seems to be the only person fully aware of Richard's character. She knows he is deceitful and is ashamed that she produced such a son. She does not bow to Richard's nice words when he speaks to her, and when he asks for a blessing from her, she asks God to put "meekness," "love, charity, obedience, and try duty" in him because she knows he lacks such virtuous traits.

At the end of the scene, we see that Richard has recruited Buckingham to his cause through deceit. We saw him earlier tell Buckingham that the queen's brothers had a part in urging Clarence's death. Here we see that Buckingham and Richard have talked about a plan to separate them from the young prince. Buckingham is trying to prevent harm from coming to the prince, whereas Richard is trying to remove the queen's brothers, who might protect the young Edward, so that he can cause harm.

# Act 2, Scene 3

## Act 2, Scene 3 Summary

In the street, two citizens meet. They talk of King Edward's death. The second citizen worries for the country now that the king is gone, since turmoil usually occurs after a king's death, especially when the next in line is not of age yet. A third citizen joins the conversation, even more worried about what is going to happen because the young prince has no-one to guide him in learning how to rule. He says the queen's brothers are too "haughty and proud," and "full of danger is the Duke of Gloucester" (Richard). According to the three men, the outlook for England is not good, and all that can be done is to leave the situation to God.

## Act 2, Scene 3 Analysis

Historically, the change of power after a ruler's death has never been a smooth occurrence. The fear of what will happen to the country with Edward dead is completely understandable, especially in the context of the War of the Roses, which had only recently "ended." (Although the war is reported to be over in the play, it actually continues until 1487. This play takes place around 1483.) The common people would wonder if they were going to be subject to another thirty years of warfare, not surprisingly. The third citizen describes the change in power as an approaching storm that they should all prepare for. This imagery does not bode well for the future of the young prince.

# Act 2, Scene 4

## Act 2, Scene 4 Summary

The Duchess of York, Queen Elizabeth and her son, the young Duke of York, await Prince Edward's return from Ludlow at the court in London. The Duchess hopes that Edward has grown since she saw him last. The queen replies that her younger son, the Duke of York, is said to have grown taller than Edward. York answers that he does not want to grow quickly because Richard once said that weeds grow quickly while "sweet flowers" grow slowly. The Duchess tells York that Richard only said that because he himself grew extremely slowly.

As they are talking, a messenger enters and reports that Prince Edward is fine, but Grey and Rivers have been arrested on the orders of Richard and Buckingham. Elizabeth sees that Richard is attempting to gain power and laments the "ruin of [her] house." She leaves with her son, York, to take refuge in Westminster Abbey, fearing that Richard might do them harm.

## Act 2, Scene 4 Analysis

The conversation between the duchess and young York about speed of growth demonstrates Richard's self-esteem issues. While others complimented York on his fast growth, Richard told him that things of quality grow slow, while only weeds grow quickly. York's statement that he does not want to grow quickly because of Richard's claim shows that he believed Richard. Richard's comment was likely nothing other than an attempt to feel better since he grew so slowly and is deformed.

The message of Rivers and Grey's imprisonment shows that Richard has carried out his plan of removing the queen's brothers in order to take power for himself. The queen and the duchess realize this and rightfully worry what will become of them and their children. Richard has already removed the rest of his competition; it is reasonable that he would remove the rest.

# Act 3, Scene 1

## Act 3, Scene 1 Summary

In London, Buckingham and Richard greet Prince Edward. Edward is upset that his other uncles, Rivers and Grey, have been arrested. Richard tells Edward that it was necessary because they were dangerous "false friends," which Edward cannot be brought to believe. Edward also thought his mother and his brother York would be present to greet him. Hastings is sent to bring them from Westminster Abbey, or at least York. The cardinal says he cannot force either of them to leave the sanctuary if they do not want to. Buckingham argues that York cannot claim sanctuary because he is too young to understand it.

Edward asks Richard where he thinks he should stay until his coronation. Richard advises that he stay in the tower, which Edward does not want to do because he does not like it there. York enters with Hastings and the cardinal and greets his brother. He then goes on to battle words with Richard. Their conversation seems to be about Richard's dagger and growth rates, but is full of double meanings. Buckingham marvels at York's sharp-witted reasoning for one so young. Edward and York agree to go to the Tower, but do so against their will.

After the brothers leave Richard, Buckingham and Catesby review their plans to place Richard on the throne. Catesby is sent to see if Stanley and Hastings will join in their plot. Catesby does not think Hastings will follow them because of his loyalty to the late King Edward, and thinks Stanley will not because of his loyalty to Hastings. Catesby is instructed to "sound" the two men out, but reveal nothing unless they seem agreeable. If they are agreeable, they will all meet in a secret council to determine how to achieve their goal. After Catesby leaves, Richard tells Buckingham that if Hastings does not go along with them, they will kill him, and promises an earldom to Buckingham for his help.

## Act 3, Scene 1 Analysis

This scene reveals Edward and his brother York to be particularly intelligent and quick-witted for their young ages. Edward, like so few of the other characters, seems to see through Richard's facade of kindness. Richard's success depends on his ability to conceal from others what he does not want them to see, and to reveal only what is useful for them to see. This does not seem to work on Edward. He is upfront about his feelings regarding his other uncles' arrest, and does not believe Richard when he tells Edward that they are dangerous "false friends." Edward replies "God keep me from false friends! But they were none." He knows better than to believe Richard, and suggests that Richard is the false friend. York is similarly immune to Richard's power with words and is able to work them just as well. Buckingham remarks on York's verbal talents: "so cunning and so young is wonderful."

York's abilities also contradict Buckingham's earlier claim that York is too young to understand sanctuary and, therefore, cannot claim it. Regardless, Buckingham's remark is ridiculous since the very purpose of sanctuary is to protect the helpless. Even more ridiculous is that the cardinal, who knows better, goes along with Buckingham's false logic.

Richard's character is revealed more fully to those around him, but has surprisingly little effect on their opinions of him. Early in the play, Richard denied being anything but loyal to the king, his family and the other lords, and acted insulted that someone would even insinuate differently. Now he is open about his treachery with Buckingham and Catesby, even telling Buckingham that he will execute those who do not join him in his endeavor. Yet, the men continue to support Richard, despite their admiration of the young princes they plan to betray. Richard's promise to Buckingham of an earldom if he continues to help Richard, and Buckingham's acceptance of the bribe, recalls the imagery of Clarence's dream of the dead men at the bottom of the ocean surrounded by wealth.

# Act 3, Scene 2

## Act 3, Scene 2 Summary

A messenger brings a message to Hastings from Stanley at four o'clock in the morning. Stanley dreamed that a boar ripped his helm from off his head. The message also says that there will be two councils tomorrow morning, and he fears danger for himself and Hastings. He suggests they flee to the north to save themselves. Hastings tells the messenger to inform Stanley there is nothing to fear from the councils, because they will be at one council, and his friend Catesby will be at the other. Therefore, he will know if anything bad is going to happen. He makes light of Stanley's dream and says that the way to anger the boar (Richard) into action is by fleeing, and says they will go to the Tower in the morning and see that Richard is not plotting against them.

Catesby enters and says that he thinks the country will not be at peace unless Richard is crowned king. Hastings, appalled at the idea, says he would die before letting Richard be crowned. Catesby informs Hastings of Richard's hope that he will join him, and is having Hastings' enemies, Rivers and Grey, executed. Hastings is not sorry to hear of their executions, since he believes they cause his earlier imprisonment, but could never agree to be disloyal to the late King Edward.

Stanley arrives, still nervous about what will happen at the separate councils. Hastings tells him there is nothing about which to worry. They leave with Buckingham to go to the council, Hastings unaware of the danger in which he is.

## Act 3, Scene 2 Analysis

Like so many others in the play, Hastings ignores warnings about Richard, and convinces Lord Stanley to do so also. The boar is Richard's symbol, and Stanley's dream of the boar ripping his helm off foreshadows his execution by Richard in the near future. Hastings is not worried about what Richard and Buckingham do in their secret council because Catesby, whom he trusts, will be at that council, inform him of everything that occurs and warn him of any danger. However, Catesby's remarks to himself and his earlier discussion with Richard and Buckingham demonstrate that he should not be trusted. Catesby tells Hastings that Richard and Buckingham "make high account" of Hastings, which makes him confident that he is in their good graces. However, Catesby's whispered aside tells us that what he means is they expect his head soon to be upon the Bridge, referring to the London Bridge, where heads of traitors were hung. It is ironic that Hastings triumphs in the beheading of his rivals Rivers and Grey, and thinks himself safe from their murderers.

# Act 3, Scene 3

## Act 3, Scene 3 Summary

Grey, Rivers and Vaughan are brought out at Pomfret Castle to be put to death. The three men criticize Lord Ratcliffe and the others who are there to execute them. Vaughan says they will all "cry woe for this hereafter." Grey comments that Queen Margaret's curse has come true. He remembers that she also cursed Richard, Buckingham and Hastings, and hopes that the curse comes true for them also. They ask God to be appeased with their deaths so that their family members will be spared, then embrace and die.

## Act 3, Scene 3 Analysis

Grey's observation that Queen Margaret's curses are coming true foreshadow the destinies of the other men cursed. It is also ironic that they are killed in the same location that King Richard II was murdered.

# Act 3, Scene 4

## Act 3, Scene 4 Summary

Hastings, Stanley, Buckingham and Bishop Ely gather and discuss the coronation date for Edward. Bishop Ely suggests the next day. Richard enters, late, and asks if he has missed anything. He is told he has not and Buckingham pulls him aside to tell him that Hastings will not join them. In Richard's absence, Hastings remarks that Richard seems cheerful today; he can tell because "never a man in Christendom/ Can lesser hide his love or hate than he, / For by his face straight shall you know his heart." Thus, Hastings concludes that Richard is not angry with anyone there.

Richard re-enters the room with Buckingham, angry that witchcraft has been used against him. He shows his arm, which is deformed, and claims that Queen Elizabeth and Hastings' mistress Shore have caused the deformation. Hastings is ordered taken away and beheaded.

Hastings laments his foolishness at not listening to Stanley. His horse also stumbled three times on the way to the Tower, another omen he should have heeded. He repents gloating at the death of his enemies, Rivers and Grey, and realizes that Margaret's curse has fallen upon him. Lovell and Ratcliffe lead Hastings away to be executed and he prophesizes the "fearfull'st time" England has ever seen under Richard's rule.

## Act 3, Scene 4 Analysis

Hastings' overconfidence leads him to disregard both his friend's dream and the omen of his horse stumbling. It also leads him to think that he knows Richard well, and can predict his behavior. One of the most ironic lines in the play is Hastings' claim that "never a man in Christendom/ Can lesser hides his love or hate than [Richard], / For by his face straight shall you know his heart." The reader knows the how mistaken this comment is. As discussed earlier, Richard is the master of dissemblance with most of the people around him. Hastings realizes that if he could have seen what Richard was he might have been able to stop Richard and save England from the "fearfull'st time" it has ever seen.

Richard's wickedness is becoming increasingly exposed. His assertion that Elizabeth and Shore caused his deformity is completely ridiculous, since he was born with it, as probably everyone in the room is aware. The idea that Hastings could be accused as a traitor for such a charge is equally ridiculous. However, such executions were common in fifteenth and sixteenth century England. Courtiers' success or failure and even life or death, depended on their relationship with the current ruler. If a courtier was not in the ruler's good graces, he or she could be stripped of privileges, titles, land, or even executed. As a result, it is unsurprising that the changeability of man's fortune is a prominent theme in Elizabethan literature, and particularly Shakespearean plays.

Hastings himself laments the "momentary grace of mortal men," which is taken away as easily as a drunken sailor is on a mast falling into the sea.

# Act 3, Scene 5

## Act 3, Scene 5 Summary

Richard and Buckingham await the Mayor at the tower. Richard asks Buckingham if he is a good enough actor to carry out their deceptions, to which Buckingham replies that he can act very well. Catesby brings the mayor to Richard and Buckingham. They tell him that they discovered Hastings to be a traitor. They called for the mayor to hear Hastings' confession, which they have already heard, but their loyal followers, Ratcliffe and Lovell, were too upset at Hastings' treachery and beheaded him before the mayor arrived. Lovell and Ratcliffe bring in Hastings' head, and Richard laments that Hastings turned bad because he loved him. The mayor says he believes Richard and Buckingham's story, and promises to tell the people of Hastings' treason.

When the mayor leaves, Richard encourages Buckingham to go after him and tell people that Edward's sons are actually bastards. He even wants Buckingham to say that Edward himself is a bastard, and makes up a story that Edward was conceived when their father was away at war in France. Richard and his men plan to meet later at Baynard Castle. Richard, meanwhile, is going to get rid of Clarence's children, and keep anyone from having access to Edward's children.

## Act 3, Scene 5 Analysis

We have seen that Richard is the ultimate actor, able to assume the façade needed for any particular moment. At the beginning of the scene, he asks Buckingham if he is able to do the same. He wants to know that Buckingham will be able to continue to help him in his plans, since they always contain deceit. At this point, it is difficult to know if Buckingham is a villain or a victim of Richard's deceit. It is possible that he believes he is doing what is right for the country, and at the end of the scene, it is evident that Richard does not tell Buckingham everything. He keeps his plans regarding Edward and Clarence's children to himself. However, believing Buckingham's motives are pure is difficult to believe. Richard has revealed his deceitful nature to Buckingham and asked him to participate in it, which he has willingly done. He knows Hastings was not guilty of treason, but goes along with his execution and lies about Hastings' treason to the mayor. He even plans to spread lies about Edward's son's (and Edward's) claim to the throne.

The tactic that Richard and Buckingham take concerning the mayor is one we have seen Richard use before. They go on the offensive, and create a lie regarding Hastings in order to justify murdering him. Thus, they accuse others in order to avoid being accused themselves. Richard did the same thing to Rivers, Grey and the queen, accusing them all of slandering him to the king, when in fact, he was guilty of that act. He did the same with Anne, saying that he did not kill her husband and father-in-law, her beauty did. The approach seems to be a good one, since it worked in the present case

as well as the previous ones. The mayor does not question Richard and Buckingham's actions, but instead promises to "acquaint our duteous citizens/ With all your just proceedings in this cause." Of course, the mayor may not want to challenge someone as powerful as Richard, but regardless, the scheme works.

# Act 3, Scene 6

## Act 3, Scene 6 Summary

A scrivener, someone paid to write documents, states that he has finished writing the indictment for Hastings, which officially labels him a traitor. He is disgusted by Richard's actions, and that nothing is being done about it. He wonders who could be stupid enough to not see what Richard is doing, and laments that world is in a bad state when someone can get away with the things Richard is getting away with.

## Act 3, Scene 6 Analysis

As before, unexpected people are able to see what others cannot. Lord Hastings, Clarence and Anne could not see Richard's duplicity, but the common people, and the young princes can. The scrivener, just like the young princes and the other commoners, is powerless to do anything about Richard, whereas Hastings, Clarence and Anne all might have stopped him.

# Act 3, Scene 7

## Act 3, Scene 7 Summary

Richard and Buckingham discuss how Buckingham's speech to the people went. Buckingham told the people of Edward and his son's illegitimacy and suggested that Richard should be king instead. The speech did not have the desired effect, and the crowd stared at Buckingham in silence. Richard is angered at the crowd's reception to Buckingham's speech, and worries that the mayor will not meet with him now.

However, the mayor does come, and Buckingham tells Richard to leave until he calls him. When the mayor enters, Buckingham tells him that Richard is busy at prayer but that he will have him fetched. When Richard enters, he apologizes for keeping them waiting while he prayed. Buckingham tells Richard that he has a duty to the people and the country to become king because Edward's sons are not legitimate heirs to the throne. He argues that Richard should rule because he is the only one left of the House of York. Richard replies that he does not want to rule, and states that his physical defects make him want to hide from greatness. He urges Buckingham to crown Edward's son king. Buckingham replies that whether Richard agrees to rule or not, Edward's son will not be made king. The mayor takes up the argument and entreats Richard on behalf of the citizens to become king. Richard finally gives in, but emphasizes that he has agreed to their wishes against his will. Richard's coronation is set for the next day.

## Act 3, Scene 7 Analysis

This scene borders on comical since the reader knows that the entire argument between Richard and Buckingham is staged. Buckingham's acting ability is obviously good enough that he can keep up with Richard and the two are able to goad the mayor into unwittingly playing the part they scripted for him.

The beginning of the scene recalls the words of the scrivener in the previous scene. Buckingham recounts the reaction of the people to the idea of Richard as king. They are not happy at the prospect, and even appear terrified. Like the scrivener, the people can see Richard's character and find the thought of him as king frightening. Again, the mayor, who might do something about Richard, is fooled by his deceit, and he begs him to become king.

# Act 4, Scene 1

## Act 4, Scene 1 Summary

The Duchess of York, Queen Elizabeth, Dorset, Anne and Clarence's daughter have all come to visit the young princes at the Tower. Brackenbury, the guard, tells them that Richard, whom he calls, "the king," and quickly amends to "the Lord Protector," has forbidden anyone from seeing the princes. The women are angry at the restriction, and frightened that the guard referred to Richard as "the king."

Lord Stanley enters, having been sent to fetch Anne to be crowned Richard's queen. Everyone is shocked at the news that Richard is being crowned king, and Anne regrets having married Richard and realizes her mistake in falling for Richard's "honey words." She hopes that God might give her a quick death. Elizabeth is especially distressed and urges Dorset to sail across the seas and live with Richmond. Stanley encourages Dorset to follow this advice. Anne leaves, unwillingly, to be crowned queen, Elizabeth goes to take sanctuary at the abbey and the Duchess of York hopes to die soon.

## Act 4, Scene 1 Analysis

Here we learn that Richard has attained his goals. His competition has been removed; he has become king, and married Anne. The women all lament the current state of things. The Duchess blames herself for giving birth to Richard; Anne realizes the mistake she made in agreeing to marry Richard, and regrets it; Elizabeth is worried for her sons, and urges Dorset to get away while he can. She also comprehends her doom, remembering Margaret's curse. As with the other characters in the play that understand the danger of Richard as king, the women can do nothing about it. All three women knew that Richard was a danger, and with the exception of Anne, have been powerless throughout the play to do anything about it.

# Act 4, Scene 2

## Act 4, Scene 2 Summary

At the royal court, Richard hints to Buckingham that he wants the young princes murdered. Buckingham pretends not to understand what Richard means, forcing him to make the request plainly. Buckingham does not obey right away, but says he needs time to think it over. Buckingham's hesitation angers Richard, and he sends for another man named Tyrrel, who can be tempted to anything with money. He agrees to kill the princes for Richard. Richard then tells Catesby to spread the rumor that his wife, Anne, is ill and near to death. He wants to marry Elizabeth of York, Edward's daughter, in order to strengthen his claim to the throne.

Buckingham comes back, having considered what Richard asked of him. However, Richard cuts him off and talks instead of Dorset, whom he has been informed, has fled. Buckingham asks Richard to have the earldom of Hereford as Richard had promised. Richard ignores Buckingham, and then finally tells him that he is not in the giving mood today. In an aside, he also says that he will no longer tell Buckingham his secrets. Everyone leaves, and Buckingham is left alone. He plans to flee to Wales, knowing that he is no longer in Richard's good-graces.

## Act 4, Scene 2 Analysis

Although Richard has what he wants, he is not finished with his scheming. The first time we see him as king, he is worried about the young princes, and asks Buckingham to dispose of them for him. He also plots to murder his wife and marry someone that will make his claim to kingship stronger since he believes his kingdom at present "stands on brittle glass." In addition, because Buckingham did not obey him immediately, he becomes suspicious of him and resolves not to involve him in his plans any more. Margaret's curse, which has come true for many of the other characters, has also come true for Richard. He thinks his friends are traitors, and traitors are friends. Rather than trust Buckingham, who helped Richard get where he is, he turns to Tyrrel, a "discontented gentleman" who can be tempted to anything. Such a description makes the reader wonder if Tyrrel will betray Richard if given a better price to do so.

# Act 4, Scene 3

## Act 4, Scene 3 Summary

Tyrrel has asked two men, who are experienced in bloodshed, to kill the young princes. However, despite their experience in murder, the two men "melted with tenderness and mild compassion" as they killed the princes. They regret having done the murders, and were still lamenting the deed when Tyrrel left them to tell the king his wish has been carried out. Richard enters and Tyrrel gives him his message, which Richard is glad to receive. He makes sure that Tyrrel himself saw the boys dead and buried, which Tyrrel affirms. Richard orders Tyrrel to have dinner with him later and tell him more about the murders. He also promises to reward him. Tyrrel leaves and Richard states that he has had Clarence's son imprisoned and his daughter married off. He has also had Anne killed, and now plans to marry Elizabeth, Edward's daughter, who he knows Richmond is also trying to marry,

## Act 4, Scene 3 Analysis

Richard is portrayed as worse than murderers experienced in their trade. Unlike the men hired to kill the princes, Richard has no remorse concerning their death. The murderers refer to the princes as "the most replenished sweet work of Nature/ That from the prime creation e'er she framed." The princes are described as nature's perfect creation, in contrast to Richard, a deformity of nature both in his body, and in his mind.

# Act 4, Scene 4

## Act 4, Scene 4 Summary

Queen Elizabeth walks with the Duchess of York, lamenting her murdered sons and husband. Queen Margaret, who has remained hidden in London, watches unseen. She exults that her curses have happened, and that Queen Elizabeth has been made suffer the same as she has. When Elizabeth and the Duchess sit down, Margaret comes forward and talks with them, pointing out that they are now suffering what they caused her to suffer. Margaret gloats that at least another family caused her misery, and not one of her own family as Richard is to Elizabeth and the Duchess. Margaret has been given all of the revenge she has asked for, except that Richard is alive; she asks that he will die soon so that her vengeance will be complete. She mocks Elizabeth's current state, then turns to leave, planning to live in France. Elizabeth asks her to stay and teach her how to curse her enemies as Margaret has done so effectively. Margaret tells her that her grief and sorrow will teach her how to do it.

Richard enters with his train of followers. Elizabeth and the Duchess verbally attack him, accusing him of the innumerable murders he has committed. However, Richard continues on his way, unaffected, and he will not listen. The Duchess makes him listen to her for a moment, saying it is the last time she will ever speak to him because he will either die in the battle he is on his way to, or she die of grief. She curses Richard to fail in the upcoming battle, and prays for his enemies. She promises that "bloody will be [his] end."

Elizabeth turns to leave with the Duchess, but Richard wants to talk to her. He states that he loves Elizabeth's daughter and wants to marry her. He asks her advice as to how he can win her. Elizabeth advises him to send her bleeding hearts labeled Edward and York, or a handkerchief soaked in blood said to be that of her brothers, or send her a letter detailing his noble deeds such as killing Clarence, Rivers and his other wife, Anne. She tells him there is no way her daughter would forget his awful deeds. He answers that he will tell her he did all of those things out of love for her, but Elizabeth says she would never fall for that. Richard changes tactics, saying he regrets what he has done, but can do nothing about it now but try to make amends. He can make amends by making her daughter Queen, and her future grandchildren kings. However, Elizabeth still refuses. Richard comes up with excuse after excuse, each one refuted by Elizabeth. Richard tries to swear his love for Elizabeth's daughter, but Elizabeth will not accept any sworn oath from him, since he cannot swear on anything he has not profaned or dishonored. At the end of the argument, Elizabeth agrees to try to convince her daughter to marry Richard. When she leaves, Richard calls her a "relenting fool," a "shallow changing woman" for giving into him.

Ratcliffe and Catesby enter and tell Richard that a navy has landed on their west coast, and is likely being led by Richmond. Richard tells Catesby to run to the Duke of Norfolk, and then begins to talk to Ratcliffe. Catesby has not yet left and Richard angrily asks

him why he has not followed his order, to which Catesby replies that he has not been told what to say to the duke. Richard's message is for the duke to bring an army to Salisbury and meet Richard there. Ratcliffe asks what Richard would like him to do at Salisbury, and Richard asks why he would go before Richard. Salisbury replies that he thought that is what Richard wanted, to which he replies that he has changed his mind. Stanley enters and reports that Richmond's navy is nearing, and guesses that he is going to try to take the throne. Richard says he thinks Stanley will turn traitor and join Richmond, which Stanley denies. Richard unwillingly allows Stanley to gather his men from the north to assist Richard, but only if he leaves his son, George, behind as collateral. If Stanley does not return, his son will die.

Messengers bring news that more and more nobles are joining the rebel forces. A third messenger reports though that Buckingham's army has been dispersed due to a flood, and Catesby updates the report, saying that Buckingham has been captured. However, Richmond has landed at Milford, so Richard and his men leave for Salisbury to prepare for battle.

## Act 4, Scene 4 Analysis

The beginning of the scene illustrates that Queen Elizabeth has indeed come to the same fate as Queen Margaret, just as Margaret had hoped and predicted. Margaret's gloating over Elizabeth and the Duchess may appear heartless, but it is reasonable to assume that they would react the same way if the cause of their sorrow had been brought low, which in their case is Richard. Margaret's taunting of Elizabeth illustrates that fortune behaves as a wheel. Those who are high are brought low and visa versa. Elizabeth is experiencing fortune's fickleness: "For she being feared of all, now fearing one; / For she commanding all, obeyed of none." The idea of fortune as a wheel was common in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

However, the idea of the wheel of fortune often clashed with the concept of God's providence. It should be noted that Margaret thanks God for granting her the revenge she asked for, and doing so in the form of Richard: "O upright, just and true-disposing God, / How do I thank thee that this carnal cur/ Preys on the issue of his mother's body." If God has granted Margaret's prayer for revenge, he has done so in the form of Richard. Thus, Richard is a form of heavenly justice. This idea is one common theory ascribed to regarding Richard's character. Rather than a simply self-serving, evil character, he is an agent of God bringing justice to England. In that case, everyone who suffers because of Richard deserved it. This concept can be seen in Anne, who let her self be sucked in by the "honey words" of the devil (Richard), and in King Edward, who foolishly condemned a loyal brother on hearsay. Clarence, Rivers, and Grey all had a part in murdering members of the Lancaster family, and Buckingham joined in Richard's deceit. The argument is a good one, but is not perfect. For example, the young princes are intelligent, innocent and pure, perfect creations of nature yet are killed by Richard. Moreover, Richard is presented as something alien to nature—deformed in mind and body, not something that might come from God. So, although there is a sense in the play that divine providence is being carried out, it is meant to illustrate a larger plan that

will eventually lead up to the rule of the Tudors, the rulers at the time of Shakespeare, rather than present Richard as a source of justice.

In this scene, we also finally see someone accuse Richard of the wrongs he has committed. Richard had previously avoided this by always attacking others. When Elizabeth and his mother accuse him, he is obviously flustered and does not know what to do. He does not know how to answer their accusations, and attempts to ignore them and have the drums played louder to drown them out. He is unsuccessful, and his mother manages to curse him, just as Margaret did in Act I. However, their accusations have obviously come too late. Similarly, his talent for persuasion has been lessened. His argument with Elizabeth concerning her daughter is extremely long, with Elizabeth countering every argument with which he comes up. His response to Elizabeth's statement that he "didst kill [her] children" is ridiculous: "But in your daughter's womb I bury them." In other words, I will make up for killing your other children by marrying your daughter and giving you grandchildren. Elizabeth seems to give in at the end, however, and Richard mocks her for her weakness.

At the end of the scene, we see that Richard is beginning to distrust everyone around him. He is worried about the number of people joining the rebels against him, and begins suspecting his own supporters of rebelling against him. When Catesby does not leave because Richard has not yet given him a message, Richard is immediately angry and calls him a "dull unmindful villain." He is then suspicious of Ratcliffe when he asks what he should do in Salisbury, even though Richard had earlier said he wanted him to go there. He tells Stanley to his face that he thinks he is going to join Richmond against him, and holds his son hostage in order to prevent it. This scene makes it evident that Richard is losing control. In the coming scenes, his fortune will only continue to fall.

# Act 4, Scene 5

## Act 4, Scene 5 Summary

Sir Stanley, at his house, tells Sir Christopher to explain that Stanley would like to join him, but cannot because Richard is holding his son hostage. He is also to report that Queen Elizabeth has agreed that her daughter will marry Richmond. Before he leaves, Christopher informs Stanley that Richmond is near and has attracted many of the nobles to his cause.

## Act 4, Scene 5 Analysis

It seems that Richard's suspicions of Stanley were correct, since we see here that he does want to defect to Richmond's side. However, one must question if Stanley's current feelings were caused because of Richard's mistrust of him, and his insistence on holding Stanley's son hostage. In addition, the news that Elizabeth has agreed to let her daughter marry Richmond shows that she was not taken in by Richard's arguments at all, and has made other arrangements behind his back.

# Act 5, Scene 1

## Act 5, Scene 1 Summary

Buckingham is led to execution, and asks if Richard will speak with him, to which the sheriff answers that he will not. Buckingham laments his actions, and realizes that he is being punished because he swore to King Edward that he would never be false to his family or his allies. Thus, he is getting what he deserves.

## Act 5, Scene 1 Analysis

Like many of the other characters in the play, Buckingham realizes his wrong just before he is about to die, and admits the justice in his death. He too has had Margaret's curse fulfilled.

# Act 5, Scene 2

## Act 5, Scene 2 Summary

Richmond has received Stanley's letter and addresses his troops, encouraging them in their endeavor against Richard's tyranny. Richard is one day's march away, and they plan to engage in battle when they meet him. They are confident that they will win because they fight against Richard, who is guilty, and is only supported by people out of fear, not out of belief in him.

## Act 5, Scene 2 Analysis

As the action rises to its culmination, we see another man attempting to take the throne of England for himself. However, unlike Richard, whose sole motive was power, and bringing pain to others (recall his opening soliloquy of Act I), Richmond is interested in justice. There is no mention of attaining glory in his speech, or of the power that he will have if he defeats Richard. He speaks only of Richard's tyranny that has oppressed England, the need to eradicate it, and the righteousness of their cause.

# Act 5, Scene 3

## Act 5, Scene 3 Summary

On Bosworth's field, Richard orders his tent set up. His men appear sad and defeated. Richard tries to lift their spirits by pointing out that their army is three times the size of the rebel army, and that they have the name of the king to strengthen them whereas the rebels do not. He orders men with good military experience brought to him.

On the other side of the field, Richmond's forces set up. Richmond seems in good spirits, and gives direct orders to his lords concerning what needs to be done before the next day. He also orders a note taken to Stanley, who is camped out just south of Richard's forces. Richmond then retires to his tent with Captain Blunt and other officers to plan their battle strategy for the next day.

In Richard's tent, Richard orders Catesby to send a messenger to Stanley ordering him to bring his forces to Richard before sunrise or else his son will die. Richard asks to be left alone, but to be awoken at midnight.

Stanley arrives at Richmond's tent and wishes him victory tomorrow. He promises to fight for Richmond without appearing to do so; he does not want his son to die. Stanley leaves to return to his camp and Richmond prepares to sleep, but he prays that God will lead him to victory against his "usurping" enemies.

The ghost of Prince Edward, son of King Henry the VI enters Richard's tent and curses him to despair and die tomorrow for killing him in the prime of his youth in Tewkesbury. The ghost then enters Richmond's tent and tells him to be cheerful because the souls of wronged princes fight with him. The ghosts of Henry VI, Clarence, Rivers, Grey, Vaughan, Hastings, the young princes, Lady Anne and Buckingham all utter similar things to the two men: despising Richard for his wrongs to them, and blessing Richmond and prophesying him king.

Richard awakes; frightened, he thinks he is struck down and wounded. He realizes he was only dreaming and that there is nothing to fear. He realizes that he is a villain, and that his conscience condemns him. If he dies, there is no one who will pity him for he cannot even pity himself. Ratcliffe enters to tell Richard to awake and get ready. Richard says he fears for what will happen, and asks if his men will stay loyal. Ratcliffe tells Richard not to worry. Richard plans to eavesdrop on his men to see if any of them are traitors.

On Richmond's side of the field, he is greeted by his lords, and he tells them he is in good spirits having had a very good sleep the previous night. He addresses his soldiers, encouraging them in the battle to come. He tells them that god, and wronged souls fight on their side because they fight against God's enemy, and for the right to sleep in peace, and safeguard their wives and children.

Richard discusses what Ratcliffe learned from the eavesdropping, which was not much. Richard consults an almanac, which says the sun should be shining on them, but it is not. At first, he takes this as a bad sign for himself, but then comforts himself with the thought that if the sun is not shining for him, it is not shining for Richmond either. Norfolk enters and tells Richard that Richmond's army is coming. Richard readies himself and gives orders. He addresses his men, telling that the men they face are beggars and runaways who want to steal their land. The army is commanded to fight. A messenger enters informing Richard that Stanley refuses to fight for Richard. Richard wants Stanley's son executed, but must wait until after the battle.

## Act 5, Scene 3 Analysis

The scene jumps back and forth between the two armies and their leaders, purposely comparing and contrasting them. At the beginning of the scene, when camps are being set up, Richard's men are disheartened, while Richmond's are not. Richmond orders the men in his camp with authority and experience, whereas Richard must ask repeatedly for his tent to be set up, and must send for men with military experience to plan the battle for him. Richmond's treatment of his followers is respectful and trusting, compared to Richard who is suspicious of everyone around him. In addition, Richmond's first act the morning of the battle is to address his men. His speech is motivational, and stresses the righteousness of their cause. Richard's first act the morning of battle is to eavesdrop on some of his men. When he finally does address them, his speech is very negative, and full of dark imagery. Rather than tell the men they fight for a just cause, he derides the opponent as beggars who must be slaughtered. Richard is clearly not a good leader. His early attempt to cheer his men is both ineffectual and ironic. He tells them that they have an advantage because they have the strength of the king's name behind them. This does not uplift anyone, since they know that Richard has corrupted the title of the king, and thus, it is a weakness, not strength.

The visitations of the ghosts the night before battle make it clear who will win. Each ghost curses Richard, and blesses Richmond. However, the ghosts also make the character of Richard, in a way, positive. Because of Richard's evil, the ghosts of both the House of Lancaster and the House of York are united in their support of Richmond as the new king. Strangely, Richard has allowed the possibility to an end to the civil war that has tormented England for so long. Shakespeare knows that Richmond, who will become King Henry VII, will found the line that leads to the Queen Elizabeth in power during Shakespeare's time.

# Act 5, Scene 4

## Act 5, Scene 4 Summary

The battle ensues. Richard's horse has been slain, but he continues to fight, looking for Richmond. However, there are a number of men dressed like Richmond, so he is having a hard time finding him. He wishes for a horse.

## Act 5, Scene 4 Analysis

In this scene, we see the famous line, "A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!" The line reflects Richard's priority from the beginning of the play- himself. All of his deeds were committed to gain power for himself, and once he had it, to protect himself. Now, on the battlefield, Richard again thinks of himself. He cares nothing for his kingdom or his cause, only wishes he had a horse so that he might escape alive.

# Act 5, Scene 5

## Act 5, Scene 5 Summary

Richmond and Richard battle and Richard is killed. Richmond is crowned king. He addresses everyone present, stating that the soldiers who served Richard will be pardoned. He also says he will unite the white rose and the red (the House of Lancaster and House of York) and there will be no more civil war in England. He prays that his heirs will enrich England with lasting peace and prosperity.

## Act 5, Scene 5 Analysis

At last, Richard is brought down. It is significant that Shakespeare does not give him any words before he dies. Most kings in his plays are allowed a long soliloquy, or at least some parting phrase; but the last words from Richard are his selfish wish for a horse. In contrast, again, Richmond is allowed a long soliloquy at the end of the play. His promise to unite the Lancasters and the Yorks and bring to England a time of peace and prosperity is a compliment to the current Queen Elizabeth (at the time of writing) and her own peaceful rule.

# Characters

## Aldermen:

The aldermen are London officials ranking below the mayor in authority. Along with the mayor and the citizens of London, the aldermen are fooled in III.vii into asking Richard to become king.

## Anne (Lady Anne):

Anne is the widow of Edward, prince of Wales, who was the son and heir of King Henry Vl. She hates Richard for murdering her husband and father-in-law, but Richard charms her into marrying him. As Richard's sad queen, she dies after he tires of her. Anne first appears in I.ii, sorrowfully following the coffin of her father-in-law, Henry VI. She laments King Henry's death and curses his murderer, Richard. Lady Anne puts a curse on any woman who would marry Richard, thus□ironically□curs ing herself.

When Richard appears and tries to take over the funeral procession, Anne reacts in disgust. She calls him a "foul devil" and begs for lightning to strike him dead (I.ii.49). But Richard is determined: He flatters Anne and makes excuses for his crimes; he claims he loves her and invites her to kill him with his own sword. Eventually, Anne relents. "I would I knew thy heart," she tells him, and agrees to accept his ring (I.ii. 192).

When Anne appears for the next and last time (IV.i), she has married Richard and is miserable. She remembers the curse she made on any woman "mad" enough to become his wife and bitterly regrets that "Within so small a time, my woman's heart / Grossly grew captive to his honey words, / And prov'd the subject of mine own soul's curse" (IV.i.78-80). When called away to Westminster to be crowned Richard's queen, she goes reluctantly. In IV.ii, Richard starts the rumor that Anne is seriously ill. In IV.iii, he briefly mentions that she has died.

Traditionally, Anne has been regarded as weak and vain for being taken in by Richard's flattery. More recently, it has been pointed out that Richard approaches her when she is grieving, so she is vulnerable to his persistent demands. It has also been remarked that since Richard is the king's brother, Anne certainly cannot kill him and has little choice but to accept him. Although her appearance in the play is fairly brief, Anne is important for providing us with an early, revealing glimpse of Richard's cunning and persuasiveness.

## Archbishop of Canterbury (Cardinal Bourchier, Archbishop of Canterbury):

*See* Bourchier

## Archbishop of York (Thomas Rotherham, Archbishop of York):

*See* Rotherham

## Attendants:

Because this is a play about war and politics between royal and noble families, many of the scenes are peopled with noble or royal retainers such as attendants, councillors, gentleman, lords, and soldiers, most of whom are without speaking parts or names and many of whom are simply referred to in the stage directions as "others."

## Berkeley:

Berekely and Tressel are two gentlemen attending on Lady Anne as she follows Henry VI's coffin in I.ii. Although Anne calls them by name at line 221, neither of them has a speaking part. They are named in the scene perhaps simply to emphasize how meager the funeral services are which have been allowed for the dead king.

## Bishop of Ely (John Morton, Bishop of Ely):

*See* Morton

## Bishops:

To fool the people of London into thinking him holy and fit to rule, Richard appears in III.vii carrying a prayer book and walking "between two Bishops," neither of whom has a speaking part.

## Blunt (Sir James Blunt):

He is a nobleman and a supporter of Henry of Richmond. He first appears in V.ii as the two armies are making their way toward the battlefield.

## Bourchier (Cardinal Bourchier, Archbishop of Canterbury):

In III.i, Buckingham persuades the unwilling cardinal to use force if necessary to remove the young duke of York from the safety of sanctuary and bring him to London, ostensibly to provide company for his brother, the prince of Wales, but in reality to be imprisoned by Richard.

## Boy (Edward Plantagenet, Earl of Warwick, referred to as "Boy"):

*See* Plantagenet

## Brakenbury (Sir Robert Brakenbury):

As lieutenant of the Tower of London, Brakenbury is in charge of the Tower prison, where first the duke of Clarence and later King Edward's two young sons are imprisoned. He rigidly follows the orders he has been given, requesting, per instructions from King Edward, that Richard not speak to the prisoner Clarence as he is being taken to jail (I.i.84-87),' and later, on orders from Richard, preventing Queen Elizabeth from visiting her two young sons in the Tower (IV.i.15-17). In the first instance, he innocently provides Richard with the opportunity to slander the queen and to appear sympathetic to his brother Clarence; in the second instance, he makes it known that Richard now considers himself king. He is listed among the dead at Bosworth Field (V.v.14).

## Brandon (Sir William Brandon):

He is a supporter of Henry of Richmond. His first appearance is at Richmond's camp on Bosworth Field (V.iii). He is listed among the dead at Bosworth Field (V.v.l 4).

## Buckingham (Duke of Buckingham):

Buckingham is Richard's co-conspirator. He helps Richard become king, but falls from favor when he hesitates at murdering Edward IV s two young heirs. He then goes over to the earl of Richmond's side against Richard, but is subsequently captured by Richard's forces and executed. As Richard's co-conspirator, Buckingham's role in the play is important. Richard terms him "My other self (II.ii.151), and uses him as an advisor and a spy.

Buckingham's first appearances in the play (I.iii and II.i) do not indicate that he is anything more than a minor character; at this point, Richard refers to him merely as one of several "simple gulls" or fools whom he is deceiving (I.iii.327). However, once King Edward dies, Buckingham becomes more prominent. In If ii, he plots to put the king's heir (Edward, prince of Wales) in Richard's grasp by bringing the child to London without the protection of his mother or her followers. When Elizabeth flees to sanctuary with her youngest son (the duke of York), Buckingham takes it upon himself to order the child back to London (Ill.i). In III.v-Buckingham reveals that he is almost as good an actor as Richard is. "I can counterfeit the deep tragedian" (III.v.5), he says, as he and Richard are about to fool the mayor of London into thinking that Richard is a good man who has been cruelly betrayed. "Ghastly looks / Are at my service, like enforced smiles," he insists, "And both are ready in their offices / At any time to grace my stratagems" (III.v.8-11). He proves his point well in III.vii when he helps Richard stage so convincing

a performance of humility and royal worth that the citizens of London implore Richard to take the kingship. Buckingham, however, fails as Richard's "other self' when it comes to murdering the two young princes. In IV.ii, Richard, newly crowned, first hints then baldly states that he wants Edward's heirs killed. Buckingham's reply□"Your Grace may do your pleasure" (IV.ii.21)□fails to satisfy Richard, who wants a confederate in a crime so heinous. Buckingham's next attempt to postpone making a decision only infuriates Richard, who mutters "High-reaching Buckingham grows circumspect" (IV.ii.31). Later, when Buckingham attempts to bargain with Richard over the princes' murder, the king rejects him.

Buckingham's hesitation costs him his life. Although, like Richard, he has been called a Machiavel (one who views politics as amoral and that any means, however unscrupulous, can justifiably be used to achieve political power), ultimately he is not in the same league as his deceitful king.

## Cardinal Bourchier (Cardinal Bourchier, Archbishop of Canterbury):

*See* Bourchier

## Catesby (Sir William Catesby):

He is one of Richard's most loyal supporters and as such, he is sent in III.ii to find out whether Lord Hastings will support Richard's coronation. In III.vii, he helps Richard and Buckingham to fool the Lord Mayor, aldermen, and citizens into asking Richard to be king. On the battlefield in V.iv, he entreats King Richard to withdraw from the fighting until a horse can be found to replace the one he has lost in battle, but Richard angrily rejects this request and continues to fight without one.

## Citizens:

In II.iii, three unnamed citizens meet and worry over what will become of England now that King Edward IV is dead and his heir, Edward, prince of Wales, is still a child. Later, in III.vii, a group of citizens joins the aldermen and the mayor of Lon don in entreating Richard to be their king.

## Clarence (George, Duke of Clarence):

Brother of King Edward IV and Richard. He is imprisoned in the Tower of London after Richard turns the king against him, and even though the king decides to pardon him, Clarence is assassinated by two murderers sent by Richard. Clarence's death is brutal and humiliating: he is stabbed and his body is thrown into a cask of wine.

Although Clarence's part in the play is brief, what happens to him gives us early insight into Richard's deceitfulness and powers of persuasion. In Li, Richard commiserates with his brother as Clarence is being taken to prison, when only a few lines earlier, Richard has told the audience that he is responsible for having Clarence jailed. His false sympathy is so convincing that in I.iv, Clarence refuses to believe it when the murderers claim that Richard is their employer. "O, do not slander him," Clarence says□innocently defending his untrustworthy brother□"for he is kind" (I.iv.241). Clarence is filled with guilt for having switched sides more than once during the Wars of the Roses, and the night before his murder, his past haunts him in the form of an undersea dream□a dream which is famous for its vivid images of shipwrecks and drowning, and which, it has been argued, also foreshadows the perilous condition of England under Richard's ruthless leadership.

## Councillors:

Because this is a play about war and politics between royal and noble families, many of the scenes are peopled with noble or royal retainers such as attendants, councillors, gentleman, lords, and soldiers, most of whom are without speaking parts or names and many of whom are simply referred to in the stage directions as "others."

## Derby (Lord Stanley, Earl of Derby):

*See* Stanley

## Dorset (Marquess of Dorset):

He is Queen Elizabeth's son from a former marriage. He escapes Richard's treachery and joins the earl of Richmond's side after Richard is crowned king.

## Duchess of York:

*See* York

## Edward (Prince Edward of Wales, afterwards, King Edward V):

He is the young son and heir of King Edward IV. He is imprisoned in the Tower of London by his ambitious uncle Richard of Gloucester, along with his younger brother, the duke of York. Later both children are murdered on Richard's orders.

## Edward (King Edward IV of England):

He is the ruler of England and brother of George, duke of Clarence, and Richard, duke of Gloucester. Although he appears in only one scene, he is frequently mentioned by the other characters, and reflects the instability of England's government. King Edward bears a reputation for promiscuity. In I.i.73, Richard refers to the king's mistress Jane Shore, and in III.vii. 179-91, Buckingham describes the king's early entanglements with several women. Richard uses this information to make the king and his heirs appear unfit to rule and to make himself look virtuous by contrast.

As early as I.i.136, we are told that King Edward has become "sickly, weak, and melancholy," and that he is not likely to live much longer. Meanwhile, Richard has convinced him to imprison their brother, George, for treason, and when King Edward makes his first and only appearance (II.i), to order Queen Elizabeth and her followers to reconcile with Richard and his followers in an attempt to bring peace to his court, Richard takes the opportunity to announce that George, the duke of Clarence, has been executed. The king is overwhelmed with guilt at this news, and soon afterward (II.ii) Queen Elizabeth sorrowfully announces that he has died, leaving an underage son□Edward, the prince of Wales□to succeed him as king and providing Richard with the opportunity he has been waiting for to seize power.

## Elizabeth (Queen Elizabeth):

Formerly Lady Grey, she is the wife of King Edward IV and mother of Edward, prince of Wales, and Richard, duke of York, the king's two young heirs. She hates Richard for murdering her brother, Earl Rivers, and her sons; nevertheless, he persuades her to think of him as a suitor in marriage to her daughter Elizabeth. Queen Elizabeth's appearance in three out of the play's five acts spotlights Richard's ruthless quest for the throne, for as the king's wife and the mother of the king's heir, she has a direct interest in whether or not Richard will succeed. As early as Li, he is spreading lies about her influence over the king, and it is evident that there are two factions at court□Elizabeth with her relatives and supporters, and Richard with his henchman Buckingham. The queen first enters in I.iii, expressing her concerns about the king's illness to her brother, Lord Rivers, and her two older sons from a previous marriage, Lord Grey and the marquess of Dorset. She knows that if the king dies, her young son Edward, prince of Wales and heir to the throne, could be put under Richard's protection, "a man," she tells her sons and brother, "that loves not me, nor none of you" (I.iii.13); indeed, Richard appears shortly afterward and insults her.

In II.i, Elizabeth and her followers make peace with Richard at the king's request. By II.ii, the king has died, and the distraught queen agrees with Richard that Prince Edward of Wales□the king's chosen successor□should be brought to court. By II.iv, the queen's situation has become worse, for Richard has jailed Rivers and Grey, and keeps the Prince Edward in his custody. Elizabeth realizes that Richard now has control of the government: "Ay me! ..." she cries, "Insulting tyranny begins to jut / Upon the innocent

and aweless throne" (II.iv.49, 51-52). She flees with her youngest son, York, into sanctuary, but Richard and Buckingham order York to be brought back to London to "lodge" in the Tower with the Prince Edward (III.i), and in IV.i, Elizabeth is barred from visiting them.

Elizabeth's final and most famous meeting with Richard occurs in IV.iv, when she appears to agree to convince her daughter to marry him. This scene has been described as a battle of wits between Richard and Elizabeth, and it is not clear who wins. It has been pointed out that Elizabeth never explicit ly says that she will tell her daughter to marry Richard. Instead she asks a question, "Shall I go win my daughter to thy will?" and ends by telling Richard, "I go. Write to me very shortly, / And you shall understand from me her mind" (IV.iv.426, 428-29). Later in IV. v,' we are told that she has promised her daughter to the earl of Richmond. It is left for the audience to determine whether Elizabeth has been weak-willed and inconsistent, or, instead, has finally outwitted Richard.

## Ely (John Morton, Bishop of Ely):

*See* Morton

## Gentlemen:

Because this is a play about war and politics between royal and noble families, many of the scenes are peopled with noble or royal retainers such as attendants, councillors, gentleman, lords, and soldiers, most of whom are without speaking parts or names and many of whom are simply referred to in the stage directions as "others."

## George (George, Duke of Clarence):

*See* Clarence

## Ghosts:

On the night before his battle with Richmond, King Richard is haunted by the ghosts of his victims, including King Henry VI (the Lancastrian king defeated by Richard's family, succeeded by Richard's brother King Edward IV, and murdered by Richard) and Edward, prince of Wales, son of Henry VI. Each ghost curses Richard with death and despair. The same ghosts visit Richmond to bestow him with blessings.

## Girl (Margaret Plantagenet, Countess of Salisbury, referred to as "Girl"):

*See* Plantagenet

## Gloucester (Richard, Duke of Gloucester, afterwards King Richard III):

*See* Richard

## Grey (Lord Grey):

He is Queen Elizabeth's son from a previous marriage and he supports the succession of Edward, prince of Wales, to the throne. Since he is therefore a threat to Richard's ambitions, Richard has him imprisoned and then murdered along with Earl Rivers and Sir Thomas Vaughan in III.iii.

## Hastings (Lord Hastings):

He is Lord Chamberlain to King Edward IV. When he first appears in I.i, Lord Hastings has recently been released from prison, and Richard has convinced him that Queen Elizabeth was responsible for having sent him there. Nevertheless, he remains loyal to King Edward and, and after the king's death, he is staunchly loyal to Edward, the prince of Wales. Lord Hastings does not realize that Richard has ambitions to be king, nor does he know that Richard is a potential enemy. In III.ii, he imprudently tells Richard's ally Catesby that he would never support Richard as king instead of the prince of Wales. Consequently, Richard trumps up a charge of treason against Hastings and has him assassinated (III.iv).

## Hastings (a pursuivant):

A government official empowered to serve warrants. Coincidentally, he has the same name as Lord Hastings, to whom he speaks in his one and only scene, Ill.ii. His function is to emphasize Lord Hastings' blindness to his own danger, for when chatting with the pursuivant, Lord Hastings is optimistic about his future, unaware that Richard has marked him for execution, and in such good spirits that he gives Hastings the pursuivant a purseful of money.

## Henry (Henry, Earl of Richmond, afterwards King Henry VII of England):

*See* Richmond

## Herbert (Sir Walter Herbert):

Herbert is a supporter of Henry of Richmond. He first appears in V.ii as the two armies are making their way toward Bosworth Field.

## Keeper in the Tower:

He is a warden at the Tower of London prison. His function in the play is to listen to and sympathize with the imprisoned George, duke of Clarence, as he describes his undersea nightmare.

## Lords:

Because this is a play about war and politics between royal and noble families, many of the scenes are peopled with noble or royal retainers such as attendants, councillors, gentleman, lords, and soldiers, most of whom are without speaking parts or names and many of whom are simply referred to in the stage directions as "others."

## Lovel (Lord Lovel):

He is a courtier and a supporter of Richard. He is present at the council meeting in III.iv when Lord Hastings is accused of treason. Along with Sir Richard Ratcliffe and on orders from Richard, he escorts Lord Hastings to his execution.

## Margaret (Queen Margaret):

Margaret is the widow of Henry VI (a Lancastrian king who was murdered by Richard in *Henry VI, Part Three).* During the play, she accurately forecasts vengeance for herself and destruction for her enemies.

Shakespeare's Margaret remains in England where the play takes place rather than sailing home to France as she did according to history. Onstage, she becomes a choric figure: offering her opinion on the play's action, and prophesying doom and misery on Richard and his supporters. (In drama, an individual choric figure or a chorus is sometimes used to describe events which occur before the beginning of the play or to comment on the action of the play as it unfolds.)

Although she appears in just two scenes, her influence is evident throughout the play. She first enters in I.iii, speaking□as she often does□in asides. (An aside occurs when a character talks to the audience and is not overheard by the other characters onstage.) In this instance, Margaret comments to the audience on the bickering between her Yorkist enemies□Elizabeth and her followers on one side, and Richard and his on the other. When Margaret at last speaks directly to these characters ("Hear me, you wrangling pirates, that fall out / In sharing that which you have pill'd from me!" [I.iii. 157-58]), she curses them, and in doing so, she affects the play's action.

Margaret prays for the death of King Edward as well as his heirs and for a life of misery for Queen Elizabeth. She curses Lord Hastings and Earl Rivers with early death, and Richard with sleepless nights and ruin. She finishes by predicting that Buckingham will

be betrayed by Richard: "O Buckingham, take heed of yonder dog! / Look when he fawns he bites; and when he bites, / His venom tooth will rankle to the death" (I.iii.288-90).

By the time she appears again (IV.iv) most of her prophecies have come to pass. She exults in her revenge and shows Elizabeth and the duchess of York how to curse Richard, who has become, as Margaret had predicted, an enemy to all of them. When *Richard III* is produced onstage, Margaret's role is often omitted on grounds that the language in her scenes is too formal and repetitive to sound relevant to a modern audience. Yet, Margaret provides useful background information on Richard's grim quest for power. Her predictions and ghostlike presence ("Here in these confines slily have I lurk'd, / To watch the waning of mine enemies" [IV.iv.3-4]) reinforce the theme of divine retribution in the play, as do the characters' recollections of her prophecies when they are led to their executions. In III.iv.92-93, for example, Lord Hastings laments, "O Margaret, Margaret, now thy heavy curse / Is lighted on poor Hastings' wretched head!" Likewise Buckingham in V.i.25 cries "Thus Margaret's curse falls heavy on my neck."

Finally, her presence in the play provides a connection between the events within the play and those which have affected the characters before the play begins.

## Mayor (Lord Mayor of London):

He is the leader of the citizens of London, so it is important to Richard that the mayor is on his side; Thus in III.v, Richard and Buckingham carefully stage a scene to convince the mayor that they are justified in having executed Hastings for treachery. Later, in III.vii, they stage another elaborate scene to dupe the Lord Mayor into believing that Richard deserves to become king.

## Messengers:

There are messengers scattered throughout this play of royal intrigue and civil war. In II.iv, a messenger arrives to tell Queen Elizabeth that her brother, Earl Rivers; her son Lord Grey; and her ally Sir Thomas Vaughan have been imprisoned by Richard of Gloucester and Buckingham, thus precipitating her flight to sanctuary with her youngest son, the duke of York. In III.ii, a messenger brings warning to Lord Hastings from Lord Stanley that Richard means them both harm and that both should escape while they still can. Imprudently, Lord Hastings chooses to ignore this warning. In IV.iv, four different messengers arrive to give King Richard updates on the progress of the noblemen who are raising armies against him. Finally, in V.iii, a messenger appears on the battlefield to inform King Richard that Lord Stanley will not fight on his side. This last message means that Richard will lose the war.

## Morton (John Morton, Bishop of Ely):

He is a member of the council which has been convened to decide on the date for the prince's coronation, and is part of the famous strawberries episode (III.iv.31-34) during which Richard lulls the council (and in particular, Lord Hastings) into a false sense of security before angrily accusing Hastings of treason.

## Murderers:

In I.iii, Richard hires two murderers to kill his brother, the duke of Clarence, who is imprisoned in the Tower. In I.iv, The first murderer kills Clarence and stuffs his body in a cask of wine; the second murderer has a change of heart and refuses to participate in the crime, and in fact at the last moment tries to warn Clarence that he is going to be stabbed. In spite of their violent intentions, the two murderers are meant to be somewhat comical, and their discussion of conscience in I.iv. 117-53□before Clarence is murdered□is intended to be humorous.

## Norfolk (Duke of Norfolk):

He is a nobleman of King Edward's court and, later, a supporter of King Richard. He is present at the council which is called ostensibly to set the date for Prince Edward's coronation but which results in the execution of Lord Hastings. He is listed among the dead after the battle on Bosworth Field (V. v. 13).

## Oxford (Earl of Oxford):

He is a nobleman and a supporter of Henry of Richmond. He first appears in V.ii as the two opposing armies are making their way toward the battlefield.

## Page:

After Buckingham balks at murdering the two young princes, Richard turns to a young, "unrespective" or thoughtless page for advice on whom to hire to do his dirty work (IV.ii.29); the page suggests James Tyrrel.

## Plantagenet (Edward Plantagenet, Earl of Warwick, referred to as "Boy"):

He is the young son of George, duke of Clarence. He is referred to as "Boy" in the stage directions of II.ii. In II.ii, he tells his grandmother, the duchess of York, that according to Richard, Clarence was executed by King Edward IV. This incident demonstrates that to achieve his ambitions, Richard will even lie to a child. In IV.iii, King Richard tells us that

he has imprisoned this "son of Clarence," presumably to make his own shaky claim to the throne more secure (IV.iii.36).

## Plantagenet (Margaret Plantagenet, Countess of Salisbury, referred to as "Girl"):

She is the countess of Salisbury and a young daughter of George, duke of Clarence. She is referred to as "Girl" in the stage directions in II.ii. In IV.iii, Richard tells us that he has married her off to a commoner, presumably to make his own dubious claim to the throne more secure (see IV.iii.37).

## Priest:

He is called "Sir John" by Lord Hastings (III.ii.109), who thanks him for a sermon he had lately delivered and promises to reward him for it. This encounter underscores Lord Hastings' optimism and complete ignorance to the danger he is in from Richard.

## Ratcliffe (Sir Richard Ratcliffe):

He is one of Richard's most loyal supporters. His first appearance is in II.i. as King Edward is trying to reconcile Richard's and Queen Elizabeth's factions. In III.iii, he escorts the queen's followers□Earl Rivers, Lord Grey, and Sir Thomas Vaughan□to their execution on orders from Richard. And in III.iv he and Lord Lovel escort Lord Hastings to his execution. In IV.iv, he warns King Richard that Richmond is on his way to England backed by a powerful navy and that Buckingham has joined him. Finally, he is with King Richard in V.iii on Bosworth Field on the day of battle, and offers reassurance after the king tells him of his bad dreams of the night before.

## Richard (Richard, Duke of Gloucester, afterwards King Richard III of England):

Also known as Gloucester, Richard is the duke of Gloucester and later becomes King Richard III. He is the title character of the play and the scheming younger brother of King Edward IV and George, duke of Clarence.

The opening couplet in *Richard III* ("Now is the winter of our discontent / Made glorious summer by this son of York" [I.i. 1-2]) and the final line of V.iv ("A horse, a horse! my kingdom for a horse!" [V.iv.13]) are probably the most famous lines in the play; appropriately, they are also the first and the last words that Richard speaks. Richard is the energizing force in the play. He is responsible for most of the play's dark comedy□which usually happens when he is mocking himself or ridiculing his victims. He has been called a Machiavel (one who views politics as amoral and that any means, however unscrupulous, can justifiably be used to achieve power) because of his

ruthless drive for power. Almost as soon as he appears onstage he tells us that he is "determined to prove a villain" and mentions the traps he is laying against his own brothers (I.i.30-40). Richard describes himself as "deform'd, unfinish'd," and so unpleasant to look at that dogs bark at him, and he blames his wickedness on his looks (I.i.20-23).

A persistent thread of comedy runs through *Richard III,* a lot of it generated by Richard himself. Since the play is largely about treachery and vengeance, the comedy it contains is appropriately dark, consisting of dramatic irony as well as parody. Some of the humor comes from Richard's self-ridicule, but much of it comes when he mocks the confidence which others mistakenly place in him. Dramatic irony occurs when the audience understands the real significance of a character's words or actions but the character or those around him or her do not. Richard's sympathetic comments to his brother Clarence as he is being led away to prison (I.i.42-116) result in dramatic irony because we know from the start that Richard is responsible for having Clarence jailed.

Another instance of dramatic irony occurs when Catesby suggests that Richard should be crowned king in place of the prince of Wales, and Lord Hastings states: "I'll have this crown of mine cut from my shoulders / Before I'll see the crown so foul misplac'd" (III.ii.43-44). We already know from Richard's conversation with Buckingham one scene earlier that Lord Hastings will indeed lose his head if he opposes Richard. Both of these incidents are meant to make us smile□although perhaps grimly□at Richard's trickery and his victims' naivete.

Parody is the use of exaggerated imitation to ridicule someone or something that is meant to be taken seriously. Richard mocks both himself and Anne when he parodies a preening lover after Anne□against all odds□accepts his ring: "I'll be at charges for a looking-glass, / And entertain a score or two of tailors / To study fashions to adorn my body" (I.ii.255-57). Part of the humor in these lines comes from Richard's ability to make fun of himself.

Richard's most triumphant parody occurs in III.vii when he dupes the citizens of London into petitioning him to be their king. By imitating a holy man and appearing reluctant to accept the crown, Richard succeeds in getting the power he craves. Richard does not announce his intention to become king until III.i, but his plots and murders lead in that direction, and by IV.ii, he is crowned. A focus of debate has been whether Richard controls events or whether he is simply a divine instrument meant to clear England of the corruption of civil war so that the country can begin anew. In either case, critics have pointed out that toward the end of the play Richard has lost his sense of humor and control. "I have not that alacrity of spirit / Nor cheer of mind that I was wont to have," he declares (V.iii.73-74). The night before battle, he is tormented by sleeplessness and haunted by the ghosts of those he has murdered. The following day he is himself killed in battle by Richmond.

While most critics agree that Richard is a Machiavellian villain and that he is witty□frequently poking fun at himself as well as at his victims□they are divided on the nature of Richard's wickedness.

A significant focus of controversy is the apparent contradiction between Richard's monstrous behavior and his continuing attractiveness to audiences. One argument suggests that he is not meant to be a realistic character but a melodramatic, comic villain whose extreme antics make us laugh. A somewhat different view is that Richard's witty dialogue and his ability to mock himself make him appealing.

It has also been argued that□with the exception of the two young princes□Richard's victims are not as innocent as they appear but are instead hypocrites who know they are being used and who try unsuccessfully to use Richard. According to this interpretation, Richard is simply more clever than is anyone else in the play at getting what he wants.

## Richard (Richard, Duke of York):

*See* York

## Richmond (Henry, Earl of Richmond, afterwards King Henry VII):

He is the earl of Richmond and later, King Henry VII, and is referred to as Richmond in the stage directions. He is also a Lancastrian who raises an army to defeat King Richard III and his reign of tyranny. Although Richmond succeeds Richard as king, his part in the play is small: essentially, his goodness is meant to contrast with Richard's wickedness. His oration to his soldiers in V.iii is inspirational and patriotic; Richard's oration in the same scene is grim and belligerent. After Richmond kills Richard on the battlefield in V.v, he closes the play by calling for a reconciliation between the Houses of York and Lancaster: "We will unite the White Rose and the Red" (V.v. 19). He accomplishes this by pardoning Richard's soldiers, as well as by becoming king and making Yorkist King Edward's daughter Elizabeth his queen.

## Rivers (Earl Rivers):

(In some editions of the play, Rivers is also identified as "Anthony Woodvile" in the *Dramatis Personae).* Rivers is Queen Elizabeth's brother and supports the succession of his young nephew, Edward, prince of Wales, to the throne; thus, he is a threat to Richard's ambitions to be king. Richard has him imprisoned and assassinated along with the queen's brother, Lord Grey, and her ally Sir Thomas Vaughan.

## Rotherham (Thomas Rotherham, Archbishop of York):

He is the archbishop of York. He is with the duchess, Queen Elizabeth, and her young son Richard, duke-of York, when a messenger arrives in II.iv with news that the queen's brother, Earl Rivers, her son Lord Grey, and her ally Sir Thomas Vaughan have been

imprisoned by Richard of Gloucester and Buckingham. He encourages the queen to seek sanctuary (refuge from Richard of Gloucester) with her young son York, and also promises to continue to be her ally.

## Scrivener:

He appears in III.vi with a document which authorizes the execution of Hastings and which was composed long before Hastings is supposed to have committed his crime. The scrivener's observations demonstrate how corrupt life has become under Richard's influence.

## Sheriff of Wiltshire:

He appears in V.i, leading the duke of Buckingham to his execution on orders from King Richard. His presence allows Buckingham an opportunity to voice his regrets for supporting Richard in his evil plots.

## Soldiers:

Because this is a play about war and politics between royal and noble families, many of the scenes are peopled with noble or royal retainers such as attendants, councillors, gentleman, lords, and soldiers, most of whom are without speaking parts or names and many of whom are simply referred to in the stage directions as "others."

## Stanley (Lord Stanley, Earl of Derby):

Also called the earl of Derby, he is the earl of Richmond's stepfather, and as such is not trusted by Richard, who takes Stanley's son, George, as hostage, thereby trying to guarantee that Stanley won't dare to fight on Richmond's side. Richard's ploy, however, fails, because Stanley allies himself with Richmond in V.iii, and his refusal to fight for King Richard helps turn the battle in Richmond's favor.

## Surrey (Earl of Surrey):

He is a nobleman and a supporter of King Richard. He first appears in V.iii as Richard's army arrives at Bosworth Field where the battle will take place.

## Tressel:

Berekely and Tressel are two gentlemen attending on Lady Anne as she follows Henry VI's coffin in I.ii. Although Anne calls them by name at line 221, neither of them has a

speaking part. They are named in the scene perhaps simply to emphasize how meager the funeral services are which have been allowed for the dead king.

## Tyrrel (Sir James Tyrrel):

He is recruited by Richard to carry out the murders of the two young heirs of Edward IV after Richard's co-conspirator, Buckingham, balks at arranging the murders himself. He is described as "a discontented gentleman, / Whose humble means match not his haughty spirit" (IV.ii.36-37), and who would be willing to do "any thing" for money (IV.ii.36-37, 39).

## Urswick (Christopher Urswick):

He is a priest attending Henry, the earl of Richmond. Christopher Urswick is sent by Lord Stanley to tell Richmond, among other things, that Queen Elizabeth has offered her daughter's hand in marriage to Richmond rather than to Richard.

## Vaughan (Sir Thomas Vaughan):

He is a supporter of Queen Elizabeth and an impediment to Richard's plans, so Richard and Buckingham order Ratcliffe to have Vaughan executed along with Earl Rivers and Lord Grey, the queen's relatives.

## Woodvile (Anthony Woodvile, Earl Rivers):

*See* Rivers

## York (Duchess of York):

She is the mother of King Edward IV; George, duke of Clarence; and Richard, duke of Gloucester. She grieves for the death of King Edward and the murder of Clarence as well as for the murder of her two grandsons. Ultimately, she curses Richard for his wickedness.

During most of the play, the duchess behaves as a relatively powerless member of the royal family□she reacts to rather than causes the events going on around her. On her first appearance, for example, she mourns the duke of Clarence's death and acknowledges Richard's responsibility for his murder, but the most she can accomplish is to reproach her son in the form of a blessing and hope that he might change his ways: "God bless thee," she says to Richard, "and put meekness in thy breast, / Love, charity, obedience, and true duty!" (II.ii. 107-08).

Again, in II.iv and IV.i, as the duchess witnesses further indications of Richard's wickedness, she can only bewail her misfortunes and curse her own womb for having produced Richard (IV.i.53). By IV.iv, however, Richard has murdered her two grandsons, and the duchess has had enough. Before leaving her son Richard forever, the duchess of York delivers to him her "most grievous curse" (IV.iv.188), and one that foreshadows his destruction in battle and the victory of Richmond's forces. "Bloody thou art, bloody will be thy end" she predicts, "Shame serves thy life and doth thy death attend" (IV.iv. 195-96).

## York (Richard, Duke of York):

The younger son of King Edward IV and thus second in line to the throne when the king dies. He is imprisoned with his brother Prince Edward in the Tower by his ambitious uncle Richard, duke of Gloucester, who later has the two of them murdered.

# Character Studies

## Richard

The opening couplet in *Richard III* ("Now is the winter of our discontent/ Made glorious summer by this son of York") and the final line of Act V, scene iv ("A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!"), are probably the most famous lines in the play; appropriately, they are also the first and the last words that Richard speaks. Richard is the energizing force of the play. He is responsible for most of the play's dark comedy—which usually occurs when he is mocking himself or ridiculing his victims. He has been called a Machiavel (one who views politics as amoral and that any means, however unscrupulous, can justifiably be used to achieve political power) because of his ruthless drive for power. Almost as soon as he appears onstage he tells us that he is "determined to prove a villain" and mentions the traps he is setting against his own brothers (Act I, scene 1 . He describes himself as "deform'd, unfinish'd," and so unpleasant to look at that dogs bark at him, and he blames his wickedness on his physical appearance.

Richard does not announce his intention to become king until Act III, scene i, but his plots and murders lead in that direction, and in Act IV he is crowned. A focus of debate has been whether Richard controls events or whether he is simply a divine instrument meant to clear England of the corruption of civil war so that the country can begin afresh. In either case, toward the end of the play Richard has lost his sense of humor and control. "I have not that alacrity of spirit/ Nor cheer of mind that I was wont to have," he declares in Act V, scene iii. The night before battle, he is tormented by sleeplessness and haunted by the ghosts of those he has murdered. The following day he is himself killed in battle by Richmond.

A significant source of controversy is the apparent contradiction between Richard's monstrous behavior and his continuing attractiveness to audiences. One argument suggests that he is not meant to be a realistic character but a melodramatic, comic villain whose extreme antics make us laugh. A somewhat different view is that Richard's witty dialogue and his ability to mock himself make him appealing.

It has also been argued that—with the exception of the two young princes—Richard's victims are not as innocent as they seem but are instead hypocrites who know they are being used and who try unsuccessfully to use Richard. According to this view, Richard is simply more clever than is anyone else in the play at getting what he wants.

Lady Anne—and the Theme of Wooing Anne first appears in Act I, scene ii, sadly following the coffin of her father-in-law, Henry VI. She laments King Henry's death and curses his murderer, Richard. She also places a curse on any woman who would marry Richard—thus, ironically—cursing herself.

When Richard enters and tries to take over the funeral procession, Anne reacts in disgust. She calls him a "foul devil" and begs for lightning to strike him dead. But Richard is persistent: he flatters Anne and makes excuses for his crimes, claiming he loves her and inviting her to kill him with his own sword. Eventually, Anne relents. "I would I knew thy heart," she tells him, and agrees to accept his ring.

Some critics acknowledge how implausible this scene may appear, but attempt to show the means by which Richard successfully woos Anne into becoming his wife. Richard carefully listens to Anne, observing her changing emotions. He adapts his arguments to these changes, eventually winning her sympathy. Richard plays upon Anne's grief and skillfully manipulates her. Some critics argue that, in addition to being in mourning, Anne is susceptible to Richard's advances simply because she behaves as women were expected to do at the time.

When Anne appears for the next and last time (Act IV, scene i), she has married Richard and is miserable. She recalls the curse she had made on any woman "mad" enough to become his wife and bitterly regrets that "Within so small a time, my woman's heart/ Grossly grew captive to his honey words,/ And prov'd the subject of mine own soul's curse." When called away to Westminster to be crowned Richard's queen, she goes unwillingly. In Act IV, scene ii, Richard starts the rumor that Anne is seriously ill. In Act IV, scene iii, he briefly mentions that she has died.

Traditionally, Anne has been regarded as weak and vain for being fooled by Richard's flattery. More recently, it has been pointed out that Richard approaches her when she is grieving, so she is vulnerable to his persistent demands. It has also been suggested that since Richard is brother to the king, Anne certainly cannot kill him and has little choice but to accept him. Although her appearance in the play is fairly brief, Anne's role is important for providing us with an early and revealing glimpse of Richard's cunning and persuasiveness.

## Queen Elizabeth

Queen Elizabeth's presence in three out of the play's five acts spotlights Richard's ruthless quest for the throne, for as the king's wife and the mother of the king's heir, she has a direct interest in whether or not Richard will succeed. As early as Act 1, scene i, he is spreading lies about her influence over the king, and it is clear that there are two factions at court—Elizabeth with her relatives and supporters, and Richard with his henchman Buckingham. The queen first enters in Act I, scene iii, voicing her fears about the king's illness to her brother, Lord Rivers, and her two older sons, Lord Grey and the Marquess of Dorset. She knows that if the king dies, her young son Edward, Prince of Wales and heir to the throne, could be placed under Richard's protection, "a man," she tells her sons and brother, "that loves not me, nor none of you"; indeed, Richard appears shortly afterward and insults her.

In Act II, scene i, Elizabeth and her followers reconcile with Richard at the king's request. By Act II, scene ii, the king is dead, and the distraught queen agrees with

Richard that the Prince of Wales should be brought to court. By Act II, scene iv, the queen's situation has worsened, for Richard has imprisoned Rivers and Grey, and holds the Prince of Wales in his custody. Elizabeth realizes that Richard now controls the government: "Ay me! . . ." she cries, "Insulting tyranny begins to jut/ Upon the innocent and aweless throne." She flees with her youngest son, York, into sanctuary, but Richard and Buckingham order York to be brought back to London to "lodge" in the Tower with the Prince of Wales (Act III, scene i), and in Act IV, scene, i, Elizabeth is barred from visiting them.

Elizabeth's final and most famous encounter with Richard occurs in Act IV, scene iv, when she apparently agrees to convince her daughter to marry him. This scene has been described as a battle of wits between Richard and Elizabeth, and it is not clear who wins. It has been pointed out that Elizabeth never explicitly states that she will tell her daughter to marry him. Instead she asks a question, "Shalt I go win my daughter to thy will?" and ends by telling Richard, "I go. Write to me very shortly, / And you shall understand from me her mind." Later in Act IV, scene v, we are told that she has promised her daughter to the Earl of Richmond. Has Elizabeth been weak-willed and inconsistent, or has she finally outwitted Richard?

## Duke of Buckingham

As Richard's co-conspirator, Buckingham's role in the play is an important one. Richard calls him "My other self" (Act II, scene ii), and uses him as an advisor and a spy.

Buckingham's first appearances in the play (Act I, scene iii and Act II, scene i) give no indication that he is anything other than a minor character; at this point, Richard refers to him merely as one of several "simple gulls" or fools whom he is deceiving (Act I, scene iii). But once King Edward dies, Buckingham's role gains prominence. In Act II, scene ii, he schemes to place the king's heir (Edward, Prince of Wales) in Richard's power by fetching the child to London without the protection of his mother or her followers. When Elizabeth flees to sanctuary with her youngest son (the Duke of York), Buckingham takes it upon himself to order the child back to London (Act III, scene i).

In Act III, scene v, Buckingham reveals that he is nearly as good an actor as Richard is. "I can counterfeit the deer tragedian," he says, as he and Richard prepare to for the Mayor of London into believing that Richard is a good man who has been cruelly betrayed. "Ghastly looks/ Are at my service like enforced smiles," he insists, "And both are ready in their offices/ At any time to grace my stratagems." He proves his point well in scene vii when he helps Richard stage so convincing a performance of humility and royal worth that the citizens of London beg Richard to become king.

Buckingham, however, falls short of being Richard's "other self" when it comes to murdering the two young princes. In Act IV, scene ii, Richard, newly crowned, first hints then bluntly states that he wants Edward's heirs killed. Buckingham's reply—"Your Grace may do your pleasure" —doesn't satisfy Richard, who wants an accomplice to a crime this heinous. Buckingham's next attempt to postpone making a decision only

infuriates Richard, who mutters "High-reaching Buckingham grows circumspect." Later, when Buckingham tries to bargain with Richard over the princes' murder, the king rejects him.

Buckingham's hesitation costs him his life. Although like Richard, he has been described as a Machiavel, ultimately he is no match for his deceitful king.

## Margaret

Margaret, the bitter Lancastrian queen and widow of Henry VI, appears in only two scenes, but her influence is felt throughout the play. She first enters in Act 1, scene iii, speaking—as she often does—in asides. An aside occurs when a character talks to the audience and is not overheard by the other characters onstage. In this instance, Margaret comments to the audience on the bickering occurring between her Yorkist enemies—Elizabeth and her followers on one side, and Richard and his on the other. When Margaret finally speaks directly to these characters, she curses them, foretelling misery to Elizabeth and death to Rivers and Hastings, but reserving her most virulent warnings for Richard.

By the time she appears again (Act IV, scene iv) most of her prophecies have been fulfilled. She exults in her revenge and teaches Elizabeth and the Duchess of York how to curse Richard, who has become, as Margaret had predicted, an enemy to all of them.

When *Richard III* is produced onstage, Margaret's role is frequently left out on grounds that the language in her scenes is too formal and repetitive to sound relevant to modern audiences. On the other hand, Margaret provides useful background information on Richard's grim quest for power. Her predictions and ghostlike presence ("Here in these confines slily have I lurk'd/ To watch the waning of mine enemies." Act IV, scene iv) reinforce the theme of divine retribution in the play, as do the characters' recollections of her prophecies when they are led to their executions: in Act III, scene iv, for example, Hastings laments, "O Margaret, Margaret, now thy heavy curse/ Is lighted on poor Hastings' wretched head." Likewise Buckingham in Act V, scene i, cries "Thus Margaret's curse falls heavy on my neck."

# Conclusion

In *Richard III,* the role of Richard is the central focus: critics debate whether this ruthless, compellingly witty character has control of the people and events around him or whether he functions instead as an instrument of divine retribution. But there are other issues that scholars examine with equal care in this rich, early play of Shakespeare's. Of interest, for example, is the play's imagery (in particular the vivid pictures presented in Clarence's undersea dream the night before his murder), as well as the playwright's inclusion of Margaret as an agent of prophecy and the general attitude toward women expressed in the play. All in all, *Richard III* continues to be one of Shakespeare's most popular plays, in large measure thanks to Richard's dazzling wickedness.

(See also *Shakespearean Criticism,* Vols. 8 and 14)

# Themes

## Succession

In Act II, scene iii, of *Richard III* a group of English citizens worries over what will become of the nation now that King Edward IV has died and his heir, Edward, Prince of Wales, is still a child. The citizens know that a Protector will be appointed to govern for Prince Edward until he is old enough to rule by himself. They also know that several of the child's uncles are vying with one another to be Protector, and the citizens are frightened that the inevitable power struggle will throw the country into turmoil. They have already endured chaotic years during the Wars of the Roses, as the Houses of York and Lancaster have fought back and forth for England's throne, and they long for peace and order. Unfortunately, they get Richard instead.

The question of succession, or the order according to which a person lawfully and rightfully becomes monarch, was of much concern to the citizens of England during Shakespeare's time since their aging queen—Elizabeth I—was unmarried and had no heirs. Further, although Elizabeth was England's lawful queen, she had already weathered several challenges to her power, including those from Philip II of Spain, who had sent his Armada in 1588 in hope of defeating her; and from Mary, Queen of Scots, a relative whom Elizabeth finally had to' execute in 1587. Thus a play about an ambitious nobleman determined to become king was very relevant to Shakespeare's audience.

Richard is a usurper: he becomes king illegally and he knows that if he doesn't at least *appear* to be England's lawful ruler, then there will be endless challenges to his power. The string of murders which Richard commits before and after he becomes king can be seen as attempts to legitimize his rule.

Of the three brothers—King Edward IV; George, Duke of Clarence; and Richard, Duke of Gloucester—Richard is the youngest and farthest from succession to the crown. Clarence is before him and could also become Protector of Edward's heir, the Prince of Wales, should King Edward die. So when the king falls seriously ill, Richard plots to have Clarence die first—thus removing in one stroke a possible Protector and a potential claimant to the throne.

Richard's next move is to make certain that he alone becomes Protector to his nephew, the Prince of Wales. He eliminates Rivers, who is the prince's uncle on his mother's side, and also murders Lord Grey, the prince's half-brother. (The prince's remaining half-brother, the Marquess of Dorset, escapes to join the Earl of Richmond.)

Once Richard becomes unchallenged Protector, it is easier for him to take the throne for himself. He murders Hastings because that nobleman has sworn to remain loyal to Prince Edward's right to the throne. Then, by suggesting that the Prince of Wales and his younger brother, the Duke of York, are illegitimate and therefore unqualified for

succession, Richard and Buckingham convince the citizens that Richard is the only one left who by lineage and virtue deserves to be king.

Even after Richard becomes king, he knows that his power is vulnerable to challenge as long as the Prince of Wales and the Duke of York remain alive; although imprisoned and thus hidden from sight, these two rightful heirs to King Edward can still serve as a rallying point for dissatisfied or ambitious subjects. So Richard adds the two young princes to his list of victims.

Still, Richard does not feel secure. He imprisons Clarence's son because that child has a better claim to the throne than he, and he marries Clarence's daughter to a commoner to destroy any possibility of royal claimants coming from that line. Finally, Richard hears that his enemy the Lancastrian Earl of Richmond intends to marry Edward IV's daughter Elizabeth and thus unite the royal families of York and Lancaster. Richard hopes to forestall this union and strengthen his own claim by marrying King Edward's daughter himself, which is why in Act IV, scene iv, he tries to convince Queen Elizabeth to consent to such a marriage.

Richard's attempts to legitimize his power through bloodshed fail when he is killed in battle by the Earl of Richmond, who begins a new line of succession—the Tudors—and is crowned Henry VII.

## Language: Oaths, Curses, and Prophecies

Language is a potent weapon in *Richard III,* particularly as a source of retribution. Prophecies ana curses are delivered and fulfilled. Oaths that are made but later broken cause disaster. Curses, prophecies, and false or imprudent oaths indeed occur so frequently and are so powerful in *Richard III* that they profoundly affect the play's outcome.

As early as Act I, scene iii, Margaret influences the action by cursing virtually every principal character in the play. She prays for the death of King Edward as well as his heirs and for a life of misery for Queen Elizabeth. She curses Hastings and Rivers with early death, and Richard with sleepless nights and ruin. She finishes by prophesying that Buckingham will be betrayed by Richard: "O Buckingham, take heed of yonder dog! / Look when he fawns, he bites; and when he bites / His venom tooth will rankle to the death." By the end of the play, nearly all of Margaret's predictions and curses have been carried out.

Ironically, many of the characters bring destruction upon themselves by reinforcing Margaret's curses with their own false oaths and self-curses. For example, in Act IV, scene iv, Richard swears to Queen Elizabeth that he loves her daughter, and he supports this oath with a self-curse that is meant to take effect if his oath proves false: "God and fortune, bar me happy hours!/ Day, yield me not thy light, nor, night, thy rest!" Richard's oath is indeed false: he does not love Elizabeth's daughter but hopes to marry

her to consolidate his power. His selfcurse—ruin and sleepless nights—is identical to Margaret's curse in Act I, and by the end of the play, it is fulfilled.

## Dark Comedy

A persistent thread of comedy runs through *Richard III.* Since the play is mostly about treachery and vengeance the comedy it contains is appropriately dark, consisting of dramatic irony as well as parody. Some of the humor comes from Richard's self—ridicule, but much of it comes when he mocks the confidence which others mistakenly place in him.

Dramatic irony occurs when the audience understands the real significance of a character's words or actions but the character or those around him or her do not. Richard's sympathetic comments to his brother Clarence as he is being taken to prison (Act I, scene 1) result in dramatic irony because we know from the start that Richard is responsible for having Clarence jailed. Dramatic irony occurs again, in Act III, scene ii, when Catesby suggests that Richard should be crowned king in lieu of the Prince of Wales, and Hastings declares: "I'll have this crown of mine cut from my shoulders/ Before I'll see the crown so foul misplac'd." We already know from Richard's conversation with Buckingham one scene earlier that Hastings will indeed lose his head if he opposes Richard. Both of these incidents are intended to make us smile—although perhaps grimly—at Richard's trickery and his victims' naiveté.

Parody is the use of exaggerated imitation to ridicule someone or something that was meant to be taken seriously. Richard mocks both himself and Anne when he parodies a preening lover in Act I, scene ii, after Anne—against all odds—accepts his ring: "I'll be at charges for a looking-glass,/ And entertain a score or two of tailors/ To study fashions to adorn my body." Part of the humor comes from Richard's ability to laugh at himself.

Richard's most triumphant parody occurs when he fools the citizens of London into petitioning him to be their king. By imitating a holy man (which he most certainly is not) and appearing reluctant to accept the crown, Richard succeeds in getting the power he wants.

# Modern Connections

While *Richard III* works as a sequel to Shakespeare's trilogy, *Henry VI, Part One, .Two,* and *Three,* it can be read and performed as an independent unit, and as such it remains one of Shakespeare's most popular plays. A key to the play's popularity is its title character, Richard, whose particular brand of wickedness has withstood the test of time. Elizabethan audiences went to the theater for the same reason that we attend movies□to be entertained. Unlike most people today, however, Elizabethans were very familiar with the history of the Wars of the Roses and of Richard's rise and fall from power. To keep his audience interested in what was otherwise a well-known and sometimes dry historical account, Shakespeare had to make Richard a fascinating character, one who speaks directly to the spectators and thus involves them in his own plots, and who jokes about both himself and his victims.

Another factor which might have contributed to *Richard III's* early popularity was that royal succession, or the order according to which a person lawfully and rightfully becomes monarch, was an issue that greatly concerned English citizens during Shakespeare's time because their aging queen□Elizabeth I□was unmarried and had no heirs. Additionally, the fact that Elizabeth was England's lawful queen did not prevent challenges to her power. In 1588 Philip II of Spain sent his Armada in hope of defeating Elizabeth; earlier, in 1587, Elizabeth had found it necessary to execute Mary, queen of Scots, who had also posed a threat to her rule. So a play about an ambitious nobleman plotting to become king was very relevant to Shakespeare's audience.

Today, some producers of *Richard III* try to recapture this relevance by updating the play's setting. Thus the 1995 film version of *Richard III* takes place during the 1930s and features tanks and machine guns rather than body armor and swords; what's more, actor Ian McKellen's portrayal of a sadistic and unpredictable Richard reminds us of such dictators as Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin. Because the personality of Richard, rather than the issue of the Wars of the Roses, is of most interest to modern audiences, many productions today attempt to simplify the play's action by entirely deleting Queen Margaret□Richard's most vocal adversary in the dynastic struggle□and instead focus more closely on Richard himself and the motivation for the evil he commits. Both Ian McKellen's *Richard III* and Laurence Olivier's 1955 film version of the play leave Margaret out of the script.

With or without a modern setting or the elimination of Margaret's character, *Richard III remains* a compelling play. Richard is like a soap opera villain: he is spectacularly wicked but pretends to be honest and caring in order to confuse his victims; he betrays his friends and family and shifts the blame for his betrayals onto unsuspecting others. As Richard himself puts it: ' The secret mischiefs that I set abroach / I lay unto the grievous charge of others" (I.iii.324-25). So, for example, he feigns shock and distress upon seeing his brother George being led off to jail and blames the queen for his brother's misfortune, even though Richard is himself responsible for having gotten George imprisoned and will shortly plot to have George murdered. Likewise, Richard reproaches Queen Elizabeth and her family for turning the king against him, even while

he is slandering them behind their backs and plotting their destruction. To attain power, he will go so far as to risk ruining his own mother's reputation by spreading the rumor that her eldest son, King Edward IV, is illegitimate. Finally, with power nearly in his grasp and in true soap opera fashion, Richard pretends that he is not at all ambitious□that he does not want to rule but will do so only if the people insist□which by now of course they do, seduced and confused as they are by his duplicity.

# Overviews

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# Critical Essay #1

Source: "Richard III," in *Shakespeare's History Plays,* Chatto & Windus, 1944, pp. 198-214.

*[In this excerpt, Tillyard refers to* Richard III *as the final play in a tetralogy which includes* Henry VI, *parts one, two, and three. Further, Tillyard explains that divine retribution and the deliverance of England through God's grace is the theme of* Richard III, *and that fighting against Richard's "vast" evil is the cause that finally Unites England through Richmond.]*

. . . I [have] put the theme of *Richard III* partly in terms of God's intentions. As it is usual to put it in terms of Richard's character, I had better expand my thesis. But it is a delicate matter. People are so fond of Shakespeare that they are desperately anxious to have him of their own way of thinking. A reviewer in the *New Statesman* was greatly upset when I quoted a passage in *Measure for Measure* as evidence that Shakespeare was familiar with the doctrine of the Atonement: he at once assumed I meant that Shakespeare believed the doctrine personally. And if one were to say that in *Richard III* Shakespeare pictures England restored to order through God's grace, one gravely risks being lauded or execrated for attributing to Shakespeare personally the full doctrine of prevenient Grace according to Calvin. When therefore I say that *Richard III* is a very religious play, I want to be understood as speaking of the play and not of Shakespeare. For the purposes of the tetralogy [Shakespeare's four plays: 1 *Henry VI,* 2 *Henry VI,* 3 *Henry VI,* and *Richard IIIJ* and most obviously for this play Shakespeare accepted the prevalent belief that God had guided England into her haven of Tudor prosperity. And he had accepted it with his whole heart, as later he did not accept the supposed siding of God with the English against the French he so loudly proclaimed in *Henry V.* There is no atom of doubt in Richmond's prayer before he falls asleep in his tent at Bosworth. He is utterly God's minister, as he claims to be:

O Thou, whose captain I account myself, Look on my forces with a gracious eye; Put in their hands thy bruising irons of
wrath,
That they may crush down with a heavy fall
The usurping helmets of our adversaries.
Make us thy ministers of chastisement,
That we may praise thee in the victory.
To thee I do commend my watchful soul,
Ere I let fall the windows of mine eyes.
Sleeping and waking, O, defend me still.
[V.Iii. 108-17]

In the same spirit Shakespeare drops hints of a divine purpose in the mass of vengeance that forms the substance of the play, of a direction in the seemingly endless concatenation of crime and punishment. In 3 *Henry VI,* York at Wakefield, Young Clifford at Towton, Warwick at Barnet, and Prince Edward at T ewkesbury die defiantly without

remorse. In *Richard III* the great men die acknowledging their guilt and thinking of others. Clarence, before his murderers enter, says:

O God, if my deep prayers cannot appease
thee,
But thou wilt be aveng'd on my misdeeds,
Yet execute thy wrath in me alone:
O spare my guiltless wife and my poor
children
[I.iv. 69-72]

Edward IV, near his death, repents his having signed a warrant for Clarence's death and while blaming others for not having restrained him blames himself the most:

But for my brother not a man would speak,
Nor I, ungracious, speak unto myself
For him, poor soul. The proudest of you all
Have been beholding to him in his life;
Yet none of you would once plead for his
life.
o God, I fear thy justice will take hold
On me and you and mine and yours for this.
[II.i.126-32]

The Duchess of York, who once rejoiced when her family prospered, now in humility acknowledges the futility of ambitious strife.

Accursed and unquiet wrangling days,
How many of you have mine eyes beheld.
My husband lost his life to get the crown,
And often up and down my sons were
toss'd,
For me to joy and weep their gain and loss.
And, being seated and domestic broils
Clean overblown, themselves, the
conquerors,
Make war upon themselves: blood against
blood, Self against self. O, preposterous
And frantic outrage, end thy damned spleen.
[II.iv. 55-64]

All this penitence cannot be fortuitous; and it is the prelude to forgiveness and regeneration. But the full religious temper of the play only comes out in the two great scenes in the last third of the play: the lamentations of the three queens after Richard has murdered the princes in the Tower, and the ghosts appearing to Richard and Richmond before Bosworth. These are both extreme and splendid examples of the formal style which. . . should be considered the norm rather than the exception in the

tetralogy. Both scenes are ritual and incantatory to a high degree, suggesting an ecclesiastical context; both are implicitly or explicitly pious; and both are archaic, suggesting the prevalent piety of the Middle Ages. The incantation takes the form not only of an obvious antiphony, like Queen Margaret's balancing of her own woes with Queen Elizabeth's

I had an Edward, till a Richard kill'd him;
I had a Harry, till a Richard kill'd him;
Thou hadst an Edward, till a Richard kill'd
him;
Thou hadst a Richard, till a Richard kill'd
him
[IV.iv.40-3]

but of a more complicated balance of rhythmic phrases and of varied repetitions, as in the Duchess of York's self-address:

Blind sight, dead life, poor mortal living
ghost,
Woe's scene, world's shame, grave's due by
life usurp'd,
Brief abstract and record of tedious days,
Rest thy unrest on England's lawful earth,
Unlawfully made drunk with innocents'
blood.
[IV iv.25-9]

The piety in this scene is implicit rather than explicit, and the two passages just quoted will illustrate it. Queen Margaret is thinking of Richard's crimes and the vengeance he will incur, yet by repeating a phrase in four successive lines she expresses unconsciously the new and fruitful unity that God is to construct out of Richard's impartial wickedness. The Duchess's mention of England's *lawful* earth is in itself an assertion of the principle of order and an implicit prayer for a juster age. The medievalism and its accompanying suggestion of piety comes out in Margaret's great speech to Elizabeth, itself an example of incantation and antiphony. She refers to her prophecies made earlier in the play and now fulfilled.

I call'd thee then vain flourish of my
fortune.
I call'd thee then poor shadow, painted
queen;
The presentation of but what I was;
The flattering index of a direful pageant;
One heav'd a-high, to be hurl'd down below;
A mother only mock'd with two sweet
babes;
A dream of what thou wert, a breath, a

bubble,
A sign of dignity, a garish flag,
To be the aim of every dangerous shot;
A queen in jest, only to fIll the scene.
Where is thy husband now? where be thy
brothers?
Where are thy children? wherein dost thou
joy?
Who sues to thee and cries 'God save the
queen'?
Where be the bending peers that flatter'd
thee?
Where be the thronging troops that follow'd
thee?
Decline all this and see what now thou art:
For happy wife a most distressed widow,
For Joyful mother one that walls the name;
For queen a very caitiff crown'd with care;
For one being sued to one that humbly sues;
For one that scorn'd at me now scorn'd of me;
For one being fear'd of all now fearing one;
For one commanding all obey'd of none.
Thus hath the course of justice wheel'd
about
And left thee but a very prey to time;
Having no more but thought of what thou
wert
To torture thee the more being what thou
art.
[lV.iv.82-108]

The speech takes us back to the Middle Ages; to the laments of the fickleness of fortune, to the constant burden of *Ubi sunt* [Where are (those who were before us?)], and to the consequent contempt of the world. . . .

The scene of the ghosts of those Richard has murdered follows immediately on Richmond's solemn prayer, quoted above. It is essentially of the Morality pattern— [A Morality was a medieval play depicting the virtues and vices.] Respublica [the State] or England is the hero, invisible yet present, contended for by the forces of heaven represented by Richmond and of hell represented by Richard. Each ghost as it were gives his vote for heaven, Lancaster and York being at last unanimous. And God is above, surveying the event. The medieval strain is continued when Richard, awaking in terror, rants like Judas in the Miracle Plays [medieval religious plays] about to hang himself. The scene, like Richmond's prayer and his last speech, is very moving. It may have issued from Shakespeare's official self, from Shakespeare identifying himself with an obvious and simple phase of public opinion. But the identification is entirely sincere, and the opinion strong and right, to be shared alike by the most sophisticated and the

humblest. The scene becomes almost an act of common worship, ending with Buckingham's assertion:

God and good angels fight on Richmond's
side;
And Richard falls in height of all his pride.
[V.iii. 176-7]

And just because he participates so fully, because he holds nothing of himself back, Shakespeare can be at his best, can give to his language the maximum of personal differentiation of which he was at the time capable. This differentiation he achieves, not as in some of the other great places in the play by surprising conjunctions of words or new imagery but by subtle musical variations within a context of incantation. He seems indeed to have learnt and applied the lessons of [the Elizabethan poet Edmund] Spenser. At the same time the substance of what each ghost says is entirely appropriate to the speaker and by referring back to past events in the tetralogy serves to reinforce the structure of the plot. There may be better scenes in Shakespeare, but of these none is like this one. Of its kind it is the best.

That the play's main end is to show the working out of God's will in English history does not detract from the importance of Richard in the process and from his dominance as a character. And it is through his dominance that he is able to be the instrument of God's ends. Whereas the sins of other men had merely bred more sins, Richard's are so vast that they are absorptive, not contagious. He is the great ulcer of the body politic into which all its impurity is drained and against which all the members of the body politic are united. It is no longer a case of limb fighting limb but of the war of the whole organism against an ill which has now ceased to be organic. The metaphor of poison is constantly applied to Richard, and that of beast, as if here were something to be excluded from the human norm. Queen Margaret unites the two metaphors when she calls him "that poisonous bunch-back'd toad" and that "bottled spider," the spider being proverbially venomous.

In making Richard thus subservient to a greater scheme I do not deny that for many years now the main attraction of the play has actually been Richard's character in itself, like Satan's in [John Milton's] *Paradise Lost.* Nor was this attraction lacking from the first. Indeed it antedates the play, going back to More's *History of Richard III,* which was inserted with trifling modifications into Hall's chronicle and repeated thence by Holinshed. Shakespeare in singling out Richard III and later Henry V for special treatment as characters is not therefore departing from tradition but following closely his own main teacher of the philosophy of history, Hall.

One would like to think of Shakespeare hailing More (through Hall) as a kindred spirit and using his charm as an inspiration. Actually, though Shakespeare accepts More's heightened picture of Richard as an arch villain, he can very coolly reject the episodes of which More made much. He quite omits Edward's wonderful speech on his deathbed and the most moving scene of all, the Archbishop persuading Queen Elizabeth to give up her younger son out of sanctuary. It may be however that More's abundant sense of

humour encouraged Shakespeare to add to Richard that touch of comedy that makes him so distinguished a villain. His aside after he has gone on his knees to ask his mother's blessing is very much in More's spirit:

*Duch.* God bless thee, and put meekness in thy mind,
Love, charity, obedience, and true duty.
*Rich.* Amen; and make me cite a good old man.
That is the butt-end of a mother's blessing:
I marvel why her grace did leave it out.
[II.ii. 107-11]

A number of people have written well on the character of Richard: in one place or another all has been said that need be said. It remains now to think less in terms of alternatives and to include more than is usually done in Richard's character, even at the sacrifice of consistency. [Essayist Charles] Lamb, for instance, who in his brief references raised most of the pertinent questions, wants to exclude the melodramatic side:
Shakespeare has not made Richard so black a monster as is supposed. Wherever he is monstrous, it was to conform to vulgar opinion. But he is generally a Man.

Actually Shakespeare was already at one with vulgar opinion and willingly makes him a monster. But only in some places; in others he keeps him human. Similarly we need not choose between Richard the psychological study in compensation for physical disability and Richard the embodiment of sheer demonic will, for he is both. It is true that, as Lamb notes, Richard in the allusions to his deformity mingles. . . a perpetual reference to his own powers and capacities, by which he is enabled to surmount these petty objections; and the joy of a defect *conquered,* or *turned* into an advantage, is one cause of these very allusions, and of the satisfaction, with which his mind recurs to them.

But [critic Edward] Dowden [in *Shakespeare: His Mind and Art]* also is right when he says of Richard that his dominant characteristic is not intellectual; it is rather a daemonic energy of will. .. He is of the diabolical class. . .. He is single-hearted in his devotion to evil. .. He has a fierce joy, and he is an intense believer,—in the creed of hell. And therefore he is strong. He inverts the moral order of things, and tries to live in this inverted system. He does not succeed; he dashes himself to pieces against the laws of the world which he has outraged.

It might be retorted that the above distinction is superfluous, because an extreme manifestation of demonic will can only arise from the additional drive set in motion by an unusual need to compensate for a defect. But the point is that Shakespeare does actually make the distinction and that Richard, within the limits of the play, is psychologically both possible and impossible. He ranges from credibly motivated villain to a symbol, psychologically absurd however useful dramatically, of the diabolic.

This shift, however, is not irregular. In the first two scenes, containing his opening soliloquy, his dealings with Clarence, his interruption of the funeral of Henry VI with his courtship of Ann Nevil, he is predominantly the psychological study. Shakespeare here

builds up his private character. And he is credible; with his humour, his irony, and his artistry in crime acting as differentiating agents, creating a sense of the individual. After this he carries his established private character into the public arena, where he is more than a match for anyone except Queen Margaret. Of her alone he is afraid; and her curse establishes, along with the psychologically probable picture just created, the competing and ultimately victorious picture of the monstrosity, the country's scapegoat, the vast imposture of the commonwealth. She makes him both a cosmic symbol, the "troubler of the poor world's peace," and sub-human, a "rooting hog," "the slave of nature and the son of hell." She calls on him the curse of insomnia, which later we find to have been fulfilled. Clearly this does not apply to the exulting ironic Richard: *he* must always have slept with infant tranquility. Thus Margaret's curse is prospective, and though he continues to pile up the materials for the construction of his monstrosity, it is the credible Richard, glorying in his will and his success in compensating his disabilities, who persists till the end of the third act and the attainment of the throne. Thenceforward, apart from his outburst of energy in courting Queen Elizabeth for her daughter's hand, he melts from credible character into a combination of sheer melodrama villain and symbol of diabolism. His irony forsakes him; he is unguarded not secretive in making his plans; he is no longer cool but confused in his energy, giving and retracting orders; he *really* does not sleep; and, when on the eve of Bosworth he calls for a bowl of wine because he has not "that alacrity of spirit nor cheer of mind that I was wont to have," he is the genuine ancestor of the villain in a nineteenth century melodrama calling for whiskey when things look black. Then, with the ghosts and his awakening into his Judas-like monologue, psychological probability and melodramatic villainy alike melt into the symbol of sheer denial and diabolism. Nor does his momentary resurrection at Bosworth with his memorable shout for a horse destroy that abiding impression. That a character should shift from credible human being to symbol would not have troubled a generation nurtured on Spenser. Richard in this respect resembles one of Spenser's masterpieces, Malbecco, who from a realistic old cuckold is actually transformed into an allegorical figure called Jealousy.

Finally we must not forget that Richard is the vehicle of an orthodox doctrine about kingship. It was a terrible thing to fight the ruling monarch, and Richard had been crowned. However, he was so clearly both a usurper and a murderer that he had qualified as a tyrant; and against an authentic tyrant it was lawful to rebel. Richmond, addressing his army before Bosworth, makes the point absolutely clear:

Richard except, those whom we fight against
Had rather have us win than him they follow.
For what is he they follow? truly, gentlemen,
A bloody tyrant and a homicide;
One rais'd in blood and one in blood
establish'd;
One that made means to come by what he
hath
And slaughter'd those that were the means to
help him;
One that hath ever been God's enemy.

Then if you fIght against God's enemy,
God will in Justice ward you as his soldiers;
If you do sweat to put a tyrant down,
You sleep in peace, the tyrant being slam.
[V.iii.243-9, 252-6]

And Derby, handing Henry the crown after the battle, calls it "this long-usurped royalty."

I have indicated in outline the course of the play: the emerging of unity from and through discord, the simultaneous change in Richard from accomplished villain to the despairing embodiment of evil. Shakespeare gives it coherence through the dominant and now scarcely human figure of Queen Margaret: the one character who appears in every play [of the tetralogy]. Being thus a connecting thread, it is fitting that she give structural coherence to the crowning drama. As Richard's downfall goes back to her curse, so do the fates of most of the characters who perish in the play go back to her curses or prophecies in the same scene, 1.3. Nor are her curses mere explosions of personal spite; they agree with the tit-for-tat scheme of crime and punishment that has so far prevailed in the tetralogy. She begins by recalling York's curse on her at Wakefield for the cruelty of her party to Rutland and the penalty she has paid; and then enumerates the precisely balanced scheme of retribution appointed for the house of York:

If not by war, by surfeit die your king,
As ours by murder, to make him a king.
Edward thy son, which now is Prince of
Wales,
For Edward my son, which was Prince of Wales,
Die in his youth by like untimely violence.
Thyself a queen, for me that was a queen,
Outlive thy glory like my wretched self.
[I.iii.197-203]

Curses on minor characters follow, but Richard, as befits, has a speech to himself. His peculiar curse is the gnawing of conscience, sleeplessness, and the mistake of taking friends for enemies and enemies for friends. I have spoken of the sleeplessness above, how it could not apply to the Richard of the first three acts. Similarly it is not till Bosworth that the curse of thinking his enemies friends comes true. We are meant to think of it when Richmond says in lines quoted above that "those whom we fight against had rather have us win than him they follow." The man with the best brain in the play ends by being the most pitifully deceived. For a detailed working out of the different curses I refer the reader to A. P. Rossiter's study of the play. But it is worth recording that Margaret in her last lines before she goes out unconsciously forecasts the larger theme of the plays. Talking of Richard, she says:

Let each of you be subject to his hate,
And he to yours, and all of you to God's.
[I.iii.302-3]

Margaret does not realise that this grouping of Yorkists against Richard will unite them to the Lancastrians similarly opposed, and that the just vengeance of God had even then given way to his mercy.

In style the play is better sustained than its predecessor. There is less undifferentiated stuff, and the finest pieces of writing (as distinguished from the finest scenes) are more dramatic. The quiet concentration of the Duchess of York's last words to Richard is beyond anything in the other three plays:

Either thou wilt die, by God's just
ordinance,
Ere from this war thou turn a conqueror,
Or I with grief and extreme age shall perish
And never look upon thy face again.
Therefore take with thee my most heavy curse;
Which, in the day of battle, tire thee more
Than all the complete armour that thou
wear'st!
My prayers on the adverse party fight;
And there the little souls of Edward's
children
Whisper the spirits of thine enemies
And promise them success and victory.
Bloody thou art, bloody will be thy end;
Shame serves thy life and doth thy death
attend.
[IV.iv.182-95]

Richard's plotting with Buckingham and his acquisition of the throne though strongly organised must have tired Shakespeare. There are even signs of strain in the last stage of the process when Richard appears between the two bishops; the verse droops somewhat. After this (and it is here that Richard begins his change of nature) the vitality flags, except in patches, till the great scene when the three queens get together to join in lamentation. The courting of Elizabeth for her daughter is a prodigious affair, but not at all apt at this point. It leads nowhere; for in the very next scene (IV. 5) Elizabeth is reported to have consented to her daughter's union with Richmond. Are we to think, with E. K. Chambers [in *Shakespeare, a Survey],* that Elizabeth had outwitted Richard and had consented, only to deceive? This is so contrary to the simple, almost negative character of Elizabeth and so heavily ironical at Richard's expense that I cannot believe it. A better explanation is that Elizabeth was merely weak and changeable and that Richard's comment on her as she goes from him, having consented,

Relenting fool and shallow, changing woman, [IV.iv.431]

was truer than he thought, forecasting the second change. It is fitting that Richard, having been so often ironical at the expense of others, should himself be the occasional victim of the irony of events. Even so, the scene is far too elaborate and weighty for its

effect on the action. Indeed I suspect an afterthought, a mistaken undertaking to repeat the success of the earlier scene of courtship. It would have been better to have gone quickly on to the great finale of the ghosts and Bosworth, to that consummate expression, achieved here once and for all, of what I have ventured to call Shakespeare's official self.

# Critical Essay #2

Source: "The Resolution of the Early Period: Richard III," in *The Early Shakespeare,* The Huntington Library, 1967, PI'. 186-202.

*[Hamilton demonstrates how Richard III "combines the genres of history play and tragedy, " pointing out that if we look at the play's action through Richard's eyes, we see the history of his political progress; on the other hand, Margaret turns the play into a tragedy as each of her curses are fulfilled. Finally, Hamilton observes that the momentum of the play is toward Richard's isolation, since everyone connected with him is destroyed by him; moreover, it is Richard's isolation which eventually results in his own destruction:]*

*Richard III,* in its Quarto title "The Tragedy of King Richard the Third," combines the genres of history play and tragedy. [In drama, a tragedy recounts the significant events or actions in a protagonist's life which, taken together, bring about the catastrophe.] The demands of history itself upon the history play cause no opposition between the two genres: the strong Lancastrian bias of the age allowed the historical Richard to be as great a villain as the imagination of a tragic dramatist could desire. [John] Milton [in *Eikonoklastes,* 1650] rightly praises Shakespeare both for being "so mindfull of *Decorum"* in portraying Richard as a tyrant who counterfeits religious faith, and also for not "departing from the truth of History, which delivers him a deep dissembler, not of his affections onely, but of Religion." As the stage history of the play demonstrates and any reading confirms, Richard is the greatest of Shakespeare's historical characters. He embodies all the qualities of the political characters in the *Henry VI* plays who manipulate events to fit their own desires. *[Henry VI,* parts one, two, and three, are three plays by Shakespeare which precede *Richard III.]* He gathers within himself Joan's duplicity, Eleanor's aspirations, Winchester's pride, Buckingham's and Somerset's ambition, Margaret's and Suffolk's scheming, Clifford's revengeful fury, and, above all, York's intense passion. He stands—or crouches—as the final expression of one who uses time and opportunity to dominate his environment, overcoming for a season the adversity of circumstance, fortune, and fate by sheer human will. If, at his insistence, we look at the play from his perspective, we see a history play that shows his political triumphs, until the final moment brings his faltering before Richmond.

Early in the play, however, Margaret opposes Richard; she ensures that his history play becomes a tragedy, the climax to the tragic form that emerges in the *Henry VI* plays. After the opening scene in 1 *Henry VI* sets the stage for a tragedy with the funeral of Henry V, the action in that play turns to historical events; Salisbury's "woeful tragedy" (I.iv.77) is only an episode in the war with France, and the tragedy of Talbot is only one consequence of dissension in England. *Henry VI* contains the "tragedy" (III.ii.194) of Gloucester's death and his enemies' "plotted tragedy" (III.i.153), which ends in chaos with York's first claim to the crown. 3 *Henry VI* leads quickly to "The True Tragedie of Richard, Duke of Yorke" (the play's Quarto title) and concludes with the brutal murder of Henry and his son. In *Richard III,* the tragic form encompasses the whole p lay and all

the major characters. At the height 0 the action, Margaret feeds upon the fall of her enemies:

So now prosperity begins to mellow
And drop into the rotten mouth of death.
Here in these confines slily have I lurk'd
To watch the waning of mine enemies.
A dire induction am I witness to,
And will to France, hoping the consequence
Will prove as bitter, black, and tragical.
(IV.iv.I-7)

She is the instrument through which the historical events in Richard's reign, including finally Richard himself, become an "induction" [prologue] leading to a catastrophe that proves "bitter, black, and tragical."

*Richard III* differs from the earlier history plays in its source. More's *Historie of King Richard the Think* had already transformed mere chronicle event into a literary tradition with considerable dramatic potentiality. Shakespeare knew More through Hall, [in *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre and Yorke,* 1548] and he may have known also the dramatic treatments in Thomas Legge's *Richardus Tertius* (1579) and the anonymous *True Tragedie of Richard the Third* (1594). The tradition needed only one further transformation to achieve in *Richard III* one of the most popular plays on the English stage, second perhaps only to *Hamlet.*

The place of Shakespeare's play within this tradition can be quickly indicated. More describes Richard as an absolute villain:
Richard duke of Gloucester . . . was in Witte and courage egall with the other [Clarence], but in beautee and liniamentes of nature far underneth bothe, for he was litle of stature, eivill featured of limnes, croke backed, the left shu!der muche higher than the righte, harde favoured of visage, such as in estates is called a warlike visage, and emonge commen p ersones a crabbed face He was malicIOus, wrothfu! and envious. . .. He was close and secrete, a depe dissimuler, lowlye of countenaunce, arrogante of herte, outwardely familier where he inwarde!y hated, not !ettynge to kisse whom he thought to kill, dispiteous and cruell, not a!waye for eivi!! wi!!, but ofter for ambicion and too serve his purpose, frende and fooe were all indifferent, where his avauntage grewe, he spared no mannes deathe whose !ife withstode his purpose. He slewe in the towre kynge Henry the sixte, saiynge. now is there no heire male of kynge Edwarde the thirde, but wee of the house of Yorke: whiche murder was doen without kyng Edward his assente.

As a historian, More cannot crown his villain by accusing him of Clarence's death. He admits that "of these poinctes there is no certentie, and whosoever divineth or conjectureth, may as wel shote to fer as to shorte" (sig. AAii). To answer these conjectures, Shakespeare shows how Richard plans that murder, persuades the king to condemn Clarence, and hires the murderers. What the historian does not deny, the dramatist, being "mindfull of *Decorum,"* supplies, in order that from the beginning his

villain may be guilty of an offense that "hath the primal eldest curse upon't—/ A brother's murder."

To More's discussion of Edward's possible Implication in his brother's death Hall adds the moral lesson:

. . . what a pernicious serpent, what a venemous tode, & what a pestiferous Scorpion is that develishe whelpe, called privye envye? Agaynst it no fortres can defend, no cave can hyde, no wood can shadow, no foule can escape, nor no beaste can avoyde, her poyson is so stronge, that never man in authoritie coulde escape from the bytyng of her tethe, scrachyng of her pawes, blastyng of her breath, defou!ynge of her tayle. Wherefore, let every indifferent persone, serche Histories, rede Chronicles, looke on aucthores, aswell holy as prophane, and thei shall apparauntly perceive, that neither open warre, daily famyne, or accustomed mortalitie, is not so muche an enemie, nor so greate a malle to destroye, and suppeditate high power and nobilitie, as is roted malice, inwarde grudge, and dissimuled hatred. (sigs. Rriv-R[r]v'])

In place of this moral abstracted out of the chronicles, Shakespeare offers an image in which "that develishe whelpe, called privye envye" is embodied in Richard.

Earlier dramatic treatments follow More in displaying Richard as the Senecan tyrant [Seneca, a Roman statesman, author, and philosopher of the first century A.D., is famous for nine melodramas which had a great influence on tragic drama in Elizabethan England]. The dramatic limitations of this form show clearly in the *True Tragedie,* where Richard declares: "I hope with this lame hand of mine, to rake out that hatefull heart of Richmond, and when I have it, to eate it panting hote with salt, and drinke his blood luke warme" (1979-81). Felix E. Schelling [in his *Elizabethan Drama:* 1558-1642] believes that Shakespeare continues the line of *Tamburlaine* [a play by Christopher Marlowe, 1590] by a "concentration of interest in the heroic dimensions of a unified personality, the master passion of which carries the auditor's sympathies with It." Yet Shakespeare's hero differs radically from Marlowe's. In place of one

Threat'ning the world with high astounding
terms,
And scourging kingdoms with his conquering
sword
(Prologue, *Part I)*

he offers one whose victories are shameful—over the simple, believing Clarence, a woman's captive heart, two innocent babes, the trusting Hastings, a gullible commons, and a "Relenting fool, and shallow, changing woman" (R.TII IV.iv.431). Tamburlaine's relentless ranting here changes into the direct speaking voice of one who can say to the brother whose death he arranges because of his name:

Alack, my !ord, that fault is none of yours: He should, for that, commit your godfathers.
0, belike his Majesty hath some intent
That you should be new-christ'ned in the

Tower.
(I.i.47-50)

Since the plot leads to Clarence's death by being "new-christ'ned" in a malmsey-butt, murder has become matter for a brutal jest. Richard's tone ranges from the vigor of "Chop off his head" (III.i.193) to the sanctimonious "0, do not swear, my lord of Buckingham" (III.vii.220), from the Faustian [from Christopher Marlowe's play *Doctor Faustus* ] cry, "Have mercy, Jesu!" (V.iii.178) to the heroic "A horse! a horse! my kingdom for a horse!" (V.iv.13), or to the quiet thrust of his insolent question, superbly timed to shatter the peace of soul for which the dying Edward yearns: "Who knows not that the gentle Duke is dead?" (II.i.79).

Shakespeare displays Richard's character in the second scene, the wooing and winning of Anne. We know that she was fifteen when she first married Henry VI's son in December 1470, that after her husband's death in the following May she was disguised as a kitchen maid by Clarence in an effort to gain Warwick's estates, and that she was found by Richard, who placed her in sanctuary until the king let him marry her—Shakespeare knows only the curious fact that Richard married her the year after he murdered her husband. Accordingly, he invents the scene in which Richard woos her as she attends the funeral of Henry VI, also one of his victims. The scene proves startling from the outset. In his opening soliloquy, Richard scorns Mars [the Roman god of war] for having smoothed his wrinkled front and capering nimbly into a lady's chamber, while he himself in his deformity must remain, as Mars had been, "wrinkled" and "grim-visag'd":

And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover
To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
I am determined to prove a villain
And hate the idle pleasures of these days.
(I.i.9,28-31)

In the closing soliloquy to this opening scene he refers to his "deep intent" (I. 149) in causing Clarence's death, which we take to be his chance at the throne if the king and his brothers' children should die. Instead of saying so, however, he adds surprisingly: "For then I'll marry Warwick's youngest daughter" (I. 153). Though he hints at having "another secret close intent" (I. 158) in marrying her, that intent, as it turns out, is to prove a villain by proving a lover.

Richard's seduction of Anne is a triumph, as he realizes in mock wonder. No lover's triumph is more complete:

What! I that kill'd her husband and his
father
To take her in her heart's extremest hate,
With curses in her mouth, tears in her eyes,
The bleeding witness of my hatred by;
Having God, her conscience, and these bars

against me,
And I no friends to back my suit at all
But the plain devil and dissembling looks,
And yet to win her, all the world to
nothing!
Ha!
(I.ii.230.238)

The wooing is meant to shock, even as it shocks Richard himself.

Was ever woman in this humour woo'd?
Was ever woman in this humour won?
(II. 227-228)

he asks us; yet he need not pause for an answer. In literature, at any rate, no other woman has been wooed and won by her husband's murderer while she attends the funeral of her husband's father, who was also murdered by him. Anne's yielding cannot be explained by fear, or by her desire for him, or by a sense of guilt because her beauty drove him to murder, or by her not being deceived but cunningly deceiving him. Moral or psychological "explanation" only lessens the scene's dramatic impact. Anne's submission becomes ours: with her we recognize the reasons to curse Richard, yet we find our horror replaced by fascination. All the world loves a lover, especially if he is also a villain who makes evil attractive. Her yielding defines the kind of world we must accept, with its outrage of all human feelings, its perversion of love and marriage, and its human weakness when self is divided against self.

Yet the scene's final dramatic impact lies not in Anne's submission but in Richard's triumph. In the opening soliloquy, where he scorns lovers who trip into "a lady's chamber" (I.i.12), the suddenness of transition to the lines:

And leave the world for me to bustle in!
For then I'll marry Warwick's youngest
daughter
(ll. 152-153)

astonishes us, and perhaps Richard himself. In his soliloquies and asides throughout the play he reveals himself so intimately that we become his accomplices: in sharing his keen delight in villainy, we share his guilt. No other dramatic character, except possibly Hamlet, appeals on quite the same level in being both intimate and archetypal. If his villainy were less monstrous, if we knew less about him, or even if he took himself seriously, he would become a monster. Instead, he invites our delight in his villainies and browbeats us into accepting him. Yet here we achieve less than full intimacy: he plays a trick on us, and on himself, by proving such a successfullover. His trick is to provide the delight for which we come to the theater, the enjoyment of a moral holiday staged by a consummate actor who always plays his part and plays it perfectly. Hence the delighted surprise with which he trips nimbly into a lady's chamber. The scene takes us into Richard's mind, where all the significant dramatic action takes place.

While the play's significant action occurs internally as our dramatic interest focuses up on Richard's mind, the external action is controlle by Margaret. Her role is to project the playas a historical tragedy. She remains at the English court, contrary to historical fact, in order to revile those who have offended against her. In the scene that follows Richard's seduction of Anne, our attention turns from Richard to Margaret, whose railing causes him and the others to attack her.

Ironically, he teaches her how to curse when he claims that York's curses

from bitterness of soul
Denounc'd against thee are all fall'n upon
thee;
And God, not we, hath plagu'd thy bloody
deed.
(I.iii.179-181)

In amazement, she learns that curses are effective:
Did York's dread curse prevail so much with
heaven
That Henry's death, my lovely Edward's
death,
Their kingdom's loss, my woeful
banishment,
Should all but answer for that peevish brat?
Can curses pierce the clouds and enter
heaven?
Why then, give way, dull clouds, to my
quick curses!
(II. 191-196)

She rails no longer and curses each in turn. Each has brought her curse upon himself by wronging her. In effect, she writes the complots of the tragedies that each then acts out to fulfill her word. Edward, Elizabeth, Rivers, Grey, Hastings, the young Edward, Buckingham, and finally Richard—all suffer and "die the thrall of Margaret's curse" (IV.i.46). They exist upon the level of her dreams to become what she wishes. In 2 *Henry VI,* the banished Suffolk wishes "would curses kill" (III.ii.310); now they do, and the action of the play shows how her words become deeds. Within the play, the entire action becomes a play directed by her. Although Richard bustles in the world, dominating it for the present moment through his intelligence and will, he is her chief actor. She is the Past, the present witness to previous wrongs, and her curses determine the future. Allegorically, she is Conscience, Revenge, or one of the Destinies, with the difference that she is involved herself in the guilt, revenge, and fate that she brings on others.

The play is organized into rituals of grief. Elizabeth defines the ritual when she bewails the death of the king. In her agony of grief, she is ready to "join with black despair

against my soul/And to myself become an enemy." To the Duchess of York's question, "What means this scene of rude impatience?" she replies, "To make an act of tragic violence" (II.ii.3639). The play is composed of such acts of tragic violence. 1 *Henry VI* has only Talbot's lament upon the death of his son; 2 *Henry VI* has Gloucester's lament, Margaret's and Suffolk's lament upon his exile, and Clifford's lament upon the death of his father; and 3 *Henry VI* has York's raging when Margaret goads him to "rude impatience," Henry's lament on the molehill, joined by the laments of the father who has slain his son and of the son who has slain his father, and finally Henry's raging against Richard. In *Richard III,* every character except Richmond laments, and entire scenes are organized into rituals of lamentation.

There is even a competition in weeping. When Elizabeth bewails the death of her husband, the Duchess of York lays claim to having greater cause to grieve,

Thine being but a moiety of my moan
To overgo thy woes and drown thy cries,
(II.ii.60-61)

while Clarence's children refuse to join Elizabeth's lament because she did not weep for their father's death. She responds that she needs no help in weeping, for her tears alone can drown the world. Then their voices join in a three-part ritual of lament:

*Eliz.* Ah for my husband, for my dear Lord Edward!
*Chz/d.* Ah for our father, for our dear Lord Clarence!
*Duch.* Alas for both, both mine, Edward and Clarence!
*Eliz.* What stay had I but Edward? and he's gone.
*Child* What stay had we but Clarence? and he's gone.
*Duch.* What stays had I but they? and they are gone.
*Eliz.* Was never widow had so dear a loss.
*Child.* Were never orphans had so dear a loss.
*Duch.* Was never mother had so dear a loss.

This triple threnody [a song of lamentation for the dead] concludes with the Duchess of York's lament for them all:

Alas! I am the mother of these griefs!
Their woes are parcell'd, mine is general.
She for an Edward weeps, and so do I:
I for a Clarence weep, so doth not she.
These babes for Clarence weep, and so do I:

I for an Edward weep, so do not they.
Alas, you three on me, threefold distress'd,
Pour all your tears! I am your sorrow's
nurse,
And I will pamper it with lamentation.
(II.ii.71-88)

Such scenes may be compared to the complaint scenes that are a vehicle for Lucrece's curses and laments in her poem [Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece],* and to a similar competition in weeping between her father and Collatine. They are even closer to similar scenes in [Shakespeare's] *Titus Andronicus* that contain a dramatic gathering of rituals of lament.

Lamentation rises to a lyrical climax in a later scene when the Duchess of York, Elizabeth, and Margaret gather to mourn. Elizabeth, who has learned of the murder of her children, wails:

Wilt thou, of God, fly from such gentle
lambs And throw them in the entrails of the wolf?
When didst thou sleep when such a deed was
done?
(IV.iv.22-24)

Margaret responds, "When holy Harry died, and my sweet son" (I. 25), and the Duchess of York laments that she is the chronicle of all their woe. When they sit together, Margaret claims the seniority of her griefs and catalogs their woes:

I had an Edward, till a Richard kill'd him;
I had a husband, till a Richard kill'd him:
Thou hadst an Edward, till a Richard kill'd
him;
Thou hadst a Richard, till a Richard kill'd
him.
(ll.40-43)

Elizabeth's overwhelming grief, which leads her to cry out for "my tender babes! / My unblown flowers, new-appearing sweets!" (ll. 9-10), is modulated with both the quietness of the Duchess of York, who has long been overwhelmed by grief, for

So many miseries have craz'd my voice
That my woe-wearied tongue is still and
mute,
(II. 17-18)

and Margaret's joy in their grief:

O upright, just, and true-disposing God,
How do I thank thee that this carnal cur

Preys on the issue of his mother's body.
(II. 55-57)

Though such formalized scenes are often omitted in modern productions as being too stylized for our taste, they shape the play into a tragic history.

The story of Hastings, as one "act of tragic violence," illustrates some features of the playas a historical tragedy and distinguishes it from the earlier history plays that have similar stories of Talbot, Gloucester, and York. For although Shakespeare follows More closely in telling Hastings' story, he adds ironic humor.

Hastings' innocent remark on Richard's cheerful look, "There's some conceit or other likes him well" (III.iv.51), provides a broadly comic touch, for the "conceit" is the means of chopping off his head. Ironically, in his refusal to support Richard's claim to the throne, he pronounces his own doom:

I'll have this crown of mine cut from my
shoulders
Before I'll see the crown so foul misplac'd.
(III.ii.43-44)

In his later remark, "God knows I will not do it to the death" (l' 55), he speaks more truly than he knows.

Such ironic comedy changes the significance of his fall. More, seeing in it an example of "the vayne surety of mans mynde so neare hys death," comments: "O lorde God the blyndnesse of our mortal nature, when he most feared, he was in moste suretye, and when he reconed hym selfe moste surest, he lost his lyfe, and that within two houres after" (sig. C[C]iiir-v). In the play, Hastings himself recognizes how "too fond" (III.iv.83) he has been, repents that he triumphed over his enemies while he felt secure in grace, and then interprets his own tragedy:

O momentary grace of mortal men,
Which we more hunt for than the grace of
God!
Who builds his hope in air of your good
looks
Lives like a drunken sailor on a mast,
Ready with every nod to tumble down
Into the fata! bowels of the deep.
(II. 98-103)

Through these lines his earlier affability toward Richard—"I thank his Grace, I know he loves me well. . . His gracious pleasure" (ll. 15-18)-gains new meaning. Just before the blow falls, he speaks of "The tender love I bear your Grace" (l' 65):

His Grace looks cheerfully and smooth this
morning . . .

I think there's never a man in Christendom
Can lesser hide his love or hate than he;
For by his face straight shall you know his
heart. . . .
Marry, that with no man here he is
offended;
For, were he, he had shown it in his looks.
(ll. 50, 53-55, 59-60)

Here we see him hunting for the grace of a mortal man, as he builds his hope in air of Richard's good looks.

Hastings' moral state is central to the play— Margaret speaks of her murdered son as

now in the shade of death,
Whose bright out-shining beams thy cloudy
wrath
Hath in eternal darkness folded up,
(I.iii.267-269)

Elizabeth of her dead husband in "his new kingdom of ne'erchanging night" (IT.ii.46), Richard of the dead Clarence as one "who I indeed have cast in darkness" (I.iii.327), and Margaret of Elizabeth's dead sons as having their "infant morn" dimmed to "aged night" (IV.iv.16). Elizabeth sees herself wrecked by Richard,

in such a desp'rate bay of death,
Like a poor bark, of sails and tack!ing reft,
Rush an to pieces on thy rocky bosom.
(ll. 232-234)

In his dream Clarence falls "overboard / into the tumbling billows of the main" (I.iv.19-20). The play shows the world poised to fall "into the fatal bowels of the deep"; for the bonds between earth and heaven are broken when a "foul devil" (I.ii.50) becomes "the Lord's anointed" (IV.iv.150).

Prayers to God are for revenge, not mercy. Elizabeth accuses God of throwing "gentle lambs. . . in the entrails of the wolf" and sleeping while evil is done. The apocalyptic imagery of harvest, coming darkness, and chaos rises to a scream in Margaret's curse:

But at hand, at hand,
Ensues his piteous and unpitied end.
Earth gapes, hen burns, fiends roar, saints
pray,
To have him suddenly convey'd from hence.
Cancel his bond of life, dear God, I pray,
That I may live and say "The dog is dead."
(IV.iv.73-78)

Movement within this world is downward: Clarence's dream anticipates his descent into hell, Margaret interprets Elizabeth's state as "One heav'd a-high to be hurl'd down below" (1. 86), the death that threatens Stanley's son is a "fall / Into the blind cave of eternal night" (V.iii.61-62). The movement suggests a world ready for the Last Judgment. England becomes "this slaughterhouse" (IV.i.44), and Hastings prophesies for his country "the fearfull'st time to thee / That ever wretched age hath look'd upon" (III.iv.106-107). When Buckingham "pleads" with Richard to assume the throne because England is "almost should'red in the swallowing gulf / Of dark forgetfulness and deep oblivion" (III.vii.128-129), he mocks the truth. That final shouldering is left to Richard, his high shoulder being the symbol of his malignancy.

The hell that each character inhabits is a mental state. Its chief lyrical statement in the play, Clarence's dream, has three stages: first the blow of being shouldered into the ocean by Richard, then the pain of drowning when the waters smother his soul within him, and finally the "tempest to [his] soul" (I.iv.44) when he enters hell to be accused by those against whom he has sinned:

With that, me thoughts, a legion of foul
fiends
Environ'd me, and howled in mine ears
Such hideous cries that, with the very noise,
"I trembling wak'd, and for a season after
Could not believe but that I was in hen,
Such terrib!e impression made my dream.
(II. 58-63)

The first stage of his dream, that of being knocked overboard by Richard, is the "real" world of historical event where Richard arranges Clarence's death and the deaths of the others who stand between him and the throne. The second stage, the agony of death, is the demonic world that Richard creates, expressed in the imagery of drowning. The third stage, the tempest to the soul, is the state of despair, the private hell into which the characters fall under the burden, of guilt. Edward on his deathbed seeks to reconcile opposing factions at the court, in order that "more at peace my soul shall part to heaven" (II.i.5); but the news of Clarence's death leaves him to die with his soul "full of sorrow" (l. 96), fearing God's justice. Elizabeth resolves to "join with black despair against my soul/And to myself become an enemy." Each character dies weighed down by guilt.

One by one, those who stand between Richard and the crown—Clarence, Edward, Rivers, Grey, Vaughan, Hastings, the two princes, Margaret, Elizabeth, the Duchess of York, Anne, and Buckingham  make an "act of tragic violence." Together they are an "induction" to the thirteenth fall, a catastrophe that proves "bitter, black, and tragical": the death of Richard. The whole movement of the play effects his gradual isolation, the cutting away of all supporting human relationships. By the end he stands alone; but, being unsupported, he falls. The tragic irony of his actions is that those who stand in his way support him: after they fall, he must fall.

Richard's fall has two stages: In the first he confronts the lamenting women, the Duchess of York and Elizabeth. Earlier in the scene, Elizabeth begs Margaret:

O thou well skill'd in curses, stay awhile
And teach me how to curse mine enemies!
(IV.iv.116-117)

Margaret teaches her, even as she was taught:

Forbear to sleep the nights, and fast the
days;
Compare dead happiness with living woe;
Think that thy babes were sweeter than they
were,
And he that slew them fouler than he is.
Bett'ring thy loss makes the bad-causer
worse;
Revolving this will teach thee how to curse.
(II. 118-123)

Then Elizabeth, in turn, teaches the Duchess of York to curse. Up to this moment, the Duchess has submitted patiently to her sorrow, reduced almost to silence, seeing in herself

Dead life, blind sight, poor mortal living
ghost,
Woe's scene, world's shame, grave's due by
life usurp'd,
Brief abstract and record of tedious days.
(II. 26-28)

Now she asks, "Why should calamity be full of words?" (l. 126), and Elizabeth replies:

Windy attorneys to their client woes,
Airy succeeders of intestate joys,
Poor breathing orators of miseries,
Let them have scope; though what they wi!!
impart
Help nothing else, yet do they ease the
heart.
(II. 127-131)

The Duchess now prepares to forgo her patient resignation and make her "scene of rude impatience":

If so, then be not tongue-tied. Go with me,
And in the breath of bitter words let's
smother

My damned son that thy two sweet sons
smother'd.
The trumpet sounds; be copious in exclaims.
(II. 132-135)

When Richard enters, she forces him to stand and "patiently hear my impatience" *(l.* 156). Her curses determine the shape of his future actions:

Therefore take with thee my most grievous
curse,
Which in the day of battle tire thee more
Than all the complete arm our that thou
wear'st!
My prayers on the adverse party fight;
And there the little souls of Edward's
children
Whisper the spirits of thine enemies
And promise them success and victory.
Bloody thou art; bloody will be thy end.
Shame serves thy life and doth thy death
attend.
(ll. 187-195)

Now, when Richard triumphs over Elizabeth, as earlier he triumphed over Anne, the parallel only reinforces the contrast. Before, he needed only to flatter Anne; now he must curse himself and so swear away his future:

As I intend to prosper and repent,
So thrive I in my dangerous affairs
Of hostile arms! Myself myself confound!
Heaven and fortune bar me happy hours!
Day, Yield me not thy light; nor, night, thy
rest!
(ll. 397-401)

The triple curse upon him by Margaret, his mother, and himself begins its fulfillment in his dream before the final battle.

This dream marks the start of the second, and final, stage of his fall. The ghost of each of his victims urges him to "despair and die" (V.iii.120 ff.): that is, to despair at the moment of death and be eternally damned. Hall, worrying over Richard's fate after death, ends his story with" . . . but to God whiche knewe his interior cogitacions at the hower of his deathe I remitte the punyshment of his offences committed in his lyfe" (sig. [KKv]). If Richard repents at the last moment and so escapes hell, history provides a poor example for posterity. Holinshed [in his *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland,* 1587] reproduces Hall's remark almost exactly, adding hopefully that if it happened that God did punish Richard severely, "who shall be so hardie as to

expostulate and reason why he so dooth." Obviously, this answer does not satisfy. Shakespeare answers the question through the cry of the ghosts, "despair and die," ten times repeated. Yet each cry leaves a gap between "despair" and "die," affording that moment in which he could repent. But the ghost of Buckingham, who had helped Richard rise to the throne, now assures his fall:

O, in the battle think on Buckingham,
And die in terror of thy guiltiness!
Dream on, dream on of bloody deeds and
death;
Fainting, despair; despairing, yield thy
breath!
(V.iii.169-172)

Buckingham's curse gives Richard no instant for repentance; it dooms him, as he dies, to despair, and while he despairs, to die. He does dream on of bloody deeds and death: "Give me another horse. Bind up my wounds" (l. 177). That final Faustian cry, "Have mercy, Jesu!" comes, as with Faust, too late; for when he awakes and dismisses his dream- "Soft! I did but dream" (l. 178)-he is damned. In the final battle he asks only for a horse, and the kingdom that he is willing to give in exchange is greater than he knows.

# Critical Essay #3

As many critics have observed, *Richard III* is filled with oaths, curses, and prophecies. E. M. W. Tillyard argues that they are an expression of the play's theme of divine retribution, where the punishment of the feuding families, the destruction of Richard, and the final union of the houses of Lancaster and York are predestined. Margaret, who dispenses a significant portion of the curses and prophecies against the other characters in the play, is described by A. C. Hamilton as the "present witness to previous wrongs" and the embodiment of destiny and revenge.

Critics such as Frances Shirley and David Bevington have pointed out that the other characters inadvertently help to fulfill Margaret's prophecies by making false or imprudent oaths and thus cursing themselves: When, for example, Richard swears by his success as a king and warrior that he means well to Elizabeth and her family, his false oath turns into a self-curse, and he dies on the battlefield.

Both Karl Weber and Kristian Smidt assert that dreaming is closely related to prophecy in *Richard III.* Smidt remarks that the Duke of Clarence's undersea dream predicts his murder and subsequent drowning in the butt of malmsey. Weber maintains that Clarence's dream foreshadows the rest of the play.

Smidt further argues that Richard manufactures dreams and prophecies as a means to control other characters, and while not a genuine prophet, Richard is sufficiently confident and forceful to make his words come true.

Source: "Shakespeare's Use of Oaths," in *The TripIe Bond,* edited by Joseph G. Price, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1975, pp. 118-36.

*[In this excerpt, Shirley comments on the seriousness in Elizabethan society of making oaths or swearing and how this is revealed in Shakespeare's* Richard Ill. *When char acters in the play swear to the truth of something that they know is false, their oaths become self-curses which destroy them. So for example in Act IV, scene iv, when Richard swears mat he loves Queen Elizabeth's daughter, he stakes this lie with his success as a king and as a warrior, and consequently he fails at both. Shirley observes that the results of broken oaths are made all the more significant in the play when connected with Margaret's curses on Richard and his followers.]*

Out of the pattern of Margaret's cursing seems to grow a predilection for a kind of self-curse is ironically carried out as people break faith and the larger curse is fulfilled. Richard's "so thrive I in my enterprise / . . . As I intend more good to you and yours" (IV.iv.236-37) and Hastings's "So prosper I as I swear perfect love!" (II.i.16) are preludes to eventual destruction. Boyle [Robert Boyle in *A Free Discourse Against Customary Swearing and A Dissuasive from Cursing,* 1695] and others comment on the practice, and Falstaff [a comical character in several of Shakespeare's plays] occasionally uses the same formula, but it seems less meaningful separated from Margaret's imprecations.

Richard himself seems unbothered by conscience or curse until that moment in act V when his control slips, although we have heard that he is a troubled sleeper. Part of our fascinated horror steams from his ability to dissemble. It has been suggested that men swear because they are at a loss for words, but this is certainly not the case with a man who can persuade the mourning Lady Anne of his love. In that scene, his oaths are reserved for threatening the corpse-bearers.

Nor can one say that Richard's oaths always give credence to lies, for he may use them with true statements. As old Margaret lashes out, he seems the soul of compassion: "I cannot blame her. By God's holy Mother, / She hath had too much wrong." This obvious truth is probably calculated to remove doubt from his hypocritical statement of repentance (I.iii.306-7).

Richard meets a temporary match in Queen Elizabeth, however, as he woos her daughter. In a combat of wits, he swears by everything from his anachronistic George to God Himself. Her premise, "If something thou wouldst swear to be believ'd, / Swear then by something thou hast not wrong'd" leads her to reject each oath, cataloguing his evil deeds in the process. Finally, he slips into another of the self-curses, soon to be fulfilled:

Myself myself confound!
Heaven and fortune bar me happy hours!
Day, yield me not thy light, nor, night, thy
rest!

There is more, and this turn from the usual pattern of swearing seems to soften Elizabeth's resolution (IV.iv.166-401 *passim).*

Shakespeare matches Richard's oaths to the man.

Sometimes they are as unthinking as his rashest actions, more often as considered as his carefully planned moves to the throne. Sir Thomas More seems to have started the tradition that he swore by Saint Paul, and Shakespeare, like Holinshed, followed it. But the careful reservation of "zounds" ["by God's wounds"a strong oath] for Richard, Buckingham, and the Murderers is Shakespeare's own.

It is with the Murderers that we have a last example of the way oaths and conscience can be used to form a distinguishing vignette when a lesser dramatist might have created two mere functionaries. The Second Murderer, more sensitive to good and evil, must be reminded of the reward. For an instant he gathers himself together: "Zounds, he dies! I had forgot the reward." "Where's thy conscience now?" he is asked, and he replies cavalierly, "0, in the Duke of Gloucester's purse." He adds, scoffingly, "I'll not meddle with it; it makes a man a coward. . . a man cannot swear, but it checks him" (I.iv.128-31, 137-39). The Folio's replacement of "Zounds" with "Come" is certainly less effective in showing this man's temporary surface callousness, for when he denigrates conscience he touches on the swearing that has probably just given him a twinge.

# Critical Essay #4

Source: "'Why Should Calamity Be Full of Words?': The Efficacy of Cursing in *Richard III,"* in *Iowa State Journal of Research,* Vol. 56, No.1, August 1981, pp. 9-21.

*[Bevington examines the power of curses in* Richard III *in particular, the effectiveness of self-cursing in the play. He remarks that many of Richard's victims-Lady Anne, for example-begin by cursing themselves, and that Richard successfully avoids either cursing himself or being cursed by others until the close of Act IV, at which point he has become king and is desperately trying to hold onto power. Like his victims, the self-curses he resorts to are fulfilled. Bevington concludes that in the world of* Richard III, *people's words become instruments of divine justice that can turn against them.]*

"Why should calamity be full of words?" asks the Duchess of York in IV.iv of *Richard III,* thereby posing a question that seems central to Shakespeare's conception of rhetoric in this early historical play. What is the efficacy of language, and more precisely what is the efficacy of the language of cursing, in *Richard III?* Queen Elizabeth, for her part, having seen the downfall of her kindred and the catasrophic rise of Richard of Gloucester, is not sure that cursing can accomplish anything more than to offer emotional relief to the speaker. In answer to the Duchess of York's question, "Why should calamity be full of words," Elizabeth offers this sad tribute to the purgative value of lamentation and cursing:

Windy attorneys to their clients's woes,
Airy succeeders of intestate joys,
Poor breathing orators of miseries,
Let them have scope! Though what they will
impart
Help nothing else, yet do they ease the
heart.
(IV.iv.126-31)

She is prepared, in other words, to join the Duchess in cursing the new king of England who has killed her kindred and her children, even though she doubts that much can come of it other than letting herself go.

Elsewhere in the play, too, speakers express scepticism as to the efficacy of cursing. In I.iii when Queen Margaret curses her enemies and prophesies their ruin, she offers to exempt Buckingham from her malediction since he is guiltless of any wrong against her house.

Buckingham remains notwithstanding ungrateful and unimpressed. To her assurance that he is not "within the compass of [her] curse," Buckingham curtly rejoins, "Nor no one here; for curses never pass/ The lips of those that breathe them in the air" (I.iii.284-85). Margaret of course believes otherwise: "I will not think but they ascend the sky,/ And there awake God's gentle-sleepingpeace," she retorts. Attitudes in this play toward

the efficacy of cursing cover the whole range of possibilities, from Buckingham's jaded rationalism to the naive faith of Clarence's children, who, confronted with the news of their father's death, have no doubt as to what will happen: "God will revenge it, whom I will importune/ With earnest prayers all to that effect" (II.ii.14-15). They believe not only in God's sure and swift justice, but in their own ability to move God through imprecation. (Sadly enough, we realize, they are misinformed as to the true cause of their father's death and are sure that not Richard but King Edward will have to pay the reckoning.)

The question of the efficacy of cursing becomes, then, a matter of debate, one that is related to the conception of providential justice in the play. Do curses and prayers have an effective power over destiny? Does the actual pronouncing of certain words form a part of the process by which events are fulfilled? Are the curses spoken by Margaret and others necessary to the completion of the acts of which they speak? Why should Margaret, herself guilty of heinous atrocities in the Yorkist-Lancastrian wars, be able to move God to action by her entreaties? Are her prayers as effective as those of Clarence's innocent children? Can there be any power in Margaret's words, or is she merely a prophetess of what must be? If the latter, why does God choose such a guilt-ridden railer as his spokesman?

In this analysis I should like to focus on Richard of Gloucester's own attitudes toward these questions. I should like to examine his studious attempts to avoid, first of all, the curses of others, including Margaret, and second, the self-cursing to which his victims fall unwittingly prone. I should then like to examine the process by which Richard does in fact fall prey both to the curses of others (in particular, his mother) and to self-cursing, despite his efforts to escape such entrapments. This reversal seems to me, in fact, an integral part of the *peripeteia* [dramatic reversal] of *Richard III* and leads toward Richard's *anagnorisis* or discovery-too late for him, of course-as to the true nature of imprecatory language.

Before looking at Richard himself, let me first survey the tragic careers of his chief victims, in order to formulate the pattern against which Richard's actions are to be properly understood. That pattern seems generally to require both the pronouncement of a curse by some other character and the pronouncement of a self-curse by the person in question, though both events need not always be shown and may in some instances have occurred prior to the commencement of the play. The pattern completes itself in the recollection of self-cursing after the fatal events have come to pass, a recollection that is usually accompanied by an acknowledgment of the justice of God's wrath.

The Lady Anne is the first of Richard's victims to curse herself. Even before Richard has approached her with his outlandishly successful wooing, even as she is escorting the dead body of her father-in-law, Henry VI, to burial with tears in her eyes, Anne pronounces her own doom. She begins by cursing the murderer of her father-in-law and her husband, Prince Edward, but then turns to cursing Richard's offspring and any woman who could make the fatal error of marrying such a monster:

If ever he have child, abortive be it,
Prodigious, and untimely brought to light,
Whose ugly and unnatural aspect
May fright the hopeful mother at the view,
And that be heir to his unhappiness!
If ever he have wife, let her be made
More miserable by the hfe of him
Than I am made by my young lord and thee!
(I.ii.21-28)

The audience is aware of the irony in this self-cursing, even though the wooing itself has not yet commenced, since Richard has previously confided to us his intention of winning Anne for his wife. He has also anticipated for us the point of this self-cursing, namely that we, knowing beforehand the enormity of her betrayal of self, see Anne going willfully to her own destruction. As Richard sardonically puts it:

What though I kill'd her husband and her
father?
The readiest way to make the wench amends
Is to become her husband and her father,
The which will I.
(I.1.154-57)

Or as he exults afterwards:

What? I, that kill'd her husband and his
father,
To take her In her heart's extremest hate,
With curses in her mouth, tears in her eyes,
The bleeding witness of my hatred by,
Having God, her conscience, and these bars
against me,
And I no friends to back my suit withal,
But the plam devil and dissembling looks?
And yet to win her!
All the world to
nothing!
(I.11.230-37)

Anne's self-cursing has served, then, as a means of emphasizing her awareness of the moral consequences of her fall. Like Eve, she has been armed with knowledge of good and evil, and yet has chosen evil because she is prone to flattery and deception.

Anne's self-cursing also serves as anticipation of her recognition of the justice of her fall. As she reluctantly prepares, in IV.i, for the unwelcome coronation in which she is to play the role of queen, she recalls her earlier words that have led to her present misery:

O, when, I say, I look'd on Richard's face, This was my wish: "Be thou," quoth I, "accurs'd
For making me, so young, so old a widow!
And, when thou wed'st, let sorrow haunt thy bed;
And be thy wife-if any be so mad
More miserable by the life of thee
Than thou hast made me by my dear lord's
death!"
(IV.i.70-76)

Although she alters the circumstance of this recollection, thinking of herself as having said directly to Richard the words she actually spoke in soliloquy before his entrance, Anne does repeat the substance of her earlier statement and reports almost word for word the crucially operative phrase: "And be thy wife-if any be so mad-/ More miserable by the life of thee/ Than thou hast made me by my dear lord's death!" Shakespeare is unafraid of repetition in such circumstances; it is a part of the copiousness, subtly altered by variation that goes to make up the "fullness of words" of which the Duchess of York spoke.

Buckingham's career follows a similar pattern, even though he is manifestly more guilty than Anne of sinful conduct. First there is Margaret's warning, offered in a friendly spirit since Buckingham has done her no wrong. "O Buckingham, take heed of yonder dog," she admonishes him. "Look when he fawns, he bites; and when he bites,/ His venom tooth will rankle to the death./ Have not to do with him, beware of him;/ Sin, death, and hell have set their marks on him,/ And all their ministers attend on him" (I.iii.28893). Buckingham predictably fads to heed the warning, despite Margaret's further insistence that Richard will one day "split [Buckingham's] very heart with sorrow" and Buckingham will "say poor Margaret was a prophetess" (I.iii. 299-300). Like Anne, Buckingham proceeds to cursing of himself having been granted a full knowledge of the consequences. In the presence of the dying King Edward, who repeatedly adjures his courtiers not to dally before their king "Lest he that is the supreme King of kings/ Confound your hidden falsehood, and award/ Either of you to be the other's end" (II.i.13-15), Buckingham calls down upon himself his own well-deserved destiny. Turning to Queen Elizabeth, with whose kindred he has been factious, he solemnly intones:

Whenever Buckingham doth turn his hate
Upon your Grace, but with all duteous love
Doth cherish you and yours,
God punish me
With hate in those where I expect most love!
When I have most need to employ a friend,
And most assured that he is a friend,
Deep, hollow, treacherous, and full of guile
Be he unto me! This do I beg of God,
When I am cold in love to you or yours.
(II.i.32-40)

It is hardly surprising, perhaps, that Buckingham immediately proceeds to violate this oath by conspiring with Richard to deny Prince Edward the throne, since Buckingham (as we have seen) has already expressed his conviction that oaths are but idle speeches going no further than the lips of those who utter them. As Richard's chief supporter and henchman, moreover, he is most like Richard in his delight and ability in using rhetoric and double entendre to deceive others. He is the practiced Machiavel, able to "counterfeit the deep tragedian,/ Speak and look back, and pry on every side,/ Tremble and start at wagging of a straw;/ Intending deep suspicion, ghastly looks/ Are at my service, like enforced smiles" (III.v.5-9). [A Machiavel is one who views politics as amoral and that any means, however unscrupulous, can justifiably be used in achieving political power.]

In his downfall, however, Buckingham learns-too late for him-the true efficacy of the words spoken not only by Margaret but by himself. Noting that his arrest has appropriately fallen on All Souls' Day, he draws the necessary conclusion:

Why, then All-Souls' day is my body's
doomsday.
This is the day which, in King Edward's time,
I wish'd might fall on me, when I was found
False to his children and his wife's allies;
This is the day wherein I wish'd to fall
By the false faith of him whom most I trusted;
This, this All-Souls' day to my fearful soul Is the determin'd respite of my wrongs. That high All-Seer whIch I dallied with Hath turn'd my feigned prayer on my head And given in earnest what I begg'd in jest. Thus doth he force the swords of wicked men To turn their own points in their masters' bosoms.
Thus Margaret's curse falls heavy on my neck:
"When he," quoth she, "shall split thy heart with sorrow,
Remember Margaret was a prophetess,"
Come, lead me, officers, to the block of shame;
Wrong hath but wrong, and blame the due
of blame,
(V i.12-29)

Again we see Shakespeare's conscious rhetorical repetition of the operative words. What seemed before to Buckingham empty speech has now become confirmation of a providential pattern, by which men are fully warned and then brought low through their own devisings; their own swords are turned against their own bosoms. The curse is efficacious not as magic but as prophecy of a Just process in which wicked men undo themselves. The prophetess Margaret goes unheeded at first, like Cassandra, because men are too often blind to their own weaknesses and to the omnipresence of a providential force that will exact punishment for sin. Buckingham is like Richard in his calculated villainy, but differs importantly from him (as do virtually all of Richard's victims) in his free acknowledgment of the justice of divine retribution: "Wrong hath but wrong, and blame the due of blame." Rather than complain at the seeming injustice of his being betrayed oy his former ally, he bends his last thoughts to the acknowledgment

of a divine necessity in what has happened. Even Buckingham, then, the most seemingly unregenerate of Richard's onetime cohorts, participates in a kind of spiritual *anagnorisis* [dramatic discovery or recognition] that, as we shall see, is denied solely to the play's protagonist.

Clarence's sorrow for his own wrongdoing is so eloquently dramatized in his great jail scene that it scarcely needs elaboration here. His swearing and forswearing have all taken place before the commencement of *Richard III,* and the recollection of these events in I.iv by a man about to die serves to heighten the emphasis on contrition as a means of appeasing God's just wrath. One aspect of the scene, however, requires some analysis here, and that is the extent of emphasis on perjury. The first ghost whom Clarence encounters in his dream, renowned Warwick, asks the pointed question: "What scourge for perjury/ Can this dark monarchy afford false Clarence?" (11.50-51). The charge is telling enough, since Clarence is guilty of having solemnly engaged himself to Warwick's daughter before switching perfidiously back again to the Yorkist side. Next the ghost of Edward, the Lancastrian Prince of Wales, takes up a similar cry: "Clarence is come-false, fleeting, perjur'd Clarence,/ That stabb'd me in the field by Tewkesbury" (II.55-56). Edward too had reason to hope better of Clarence, in view of Clarence's brief Lancastrian alliance. By taking up both sides of the Lancastrian-Yorkist struggle, in fact, Clarence had of necessity perjured himself toward both sides. It is this treachery that the second murderer holds up to Clarence as the cause of his imminent execution: "And that same vengeance doth [God] hurl on thee,/ For false forswearing and for murder too" (11.204-05). Clarence protests rightly enough that his own crimes will not excuse those of his executioners, but he also possesses the philosophical perspective necessary to realize that God's justice is at work even through evil agents. Early in the play, then, we are shown the moralized form of *anagnorisis* to which most of the flawed characters, though not Richard, will be subjected.

Other characters can be dealt with more briefly. Hastings' career fully exemplifies the pattern we are exploring here. He is cursed by Margaret for having been present at the murder of her son Rutland, but plainly indicates by his contemptuous reply to her that he has not yet learned to take prophecy seriously: "False-boding women, end thy frantic curse,/ Lest to thy harm thou move our patience," he retorts (I.iii.246-47). He proceeds to curse himself in the presence of the dying King Edward by swearing an end to his hatred of the queen's allies. The hollowness of this oath becomes the subject of much double-entrendre in the bitterly ironic scenes preceding Hastings' arrest, for it is the news of the execution of Rivers, Vaughan, and Grey that persuades Hastings of Richard's continued affection and trust toward him. He is unwilling to see the resemblance between his own plight and that of his enemies, despite Derby's warning that "The lords at Pomfret, when they rode from London,/ Were jocund, and suppos'd their states were sure" (III.ii.83-84); Hastings is blinded by his own overconfidence and obsessive desire for revenge at any cost. And it is this desire for revenge, and his consequent perjury, that necessitate (as he perceives it) the just anger of the Almighty:

I now repent I told the pursuivant,
As too triumphing, how mine enemies
Today at Pomfret bloodily were butcher'd,

And I myself secure in grace and favor.
O Margaret, Margaret, now thy heavy curse
Is lighted on poor Hastings' wretched head!
(III.iv.88-93)

Again, like Buckingham, and others, Hastings expresses no resentment or sense of injustice at the fact of Richard's triumph over him but focuses instead on his realization that Richard's villainy has paradoxically served a just cause as far as Hastings is concerned. Once again the swords of wicked men have turned their own points into their masters' bosoms.

In a similar fashion, the queen's kindred, Rivers, Grey, and Vaughan, are cursed by Margaret for being accessories to Rutland's death, forswear and perjure themselves in the presence of both their temporal and eternal king, and concede at the time of their arrest the appropriateness of their doom (though they also protest that their deaths will be "guiltless" and "unjust," III.iii). They ask only that God hear their prayers as well, and carry out justice on Richard and Buckingham according to Margaret's prophecy as he has done in their own case. King Edward IV, too, is cursed by Margaret. His crimes have for the most part been committed in *Henry VI, Part III,* but we are shown the scene of his recognition in which he confesses his perjured ingratitude toward his brother Clarence and laments, as he is led away to his death chamber, "0 God, I fear thy justice will take hold/ On me, and you, and mine, and yours for this" (II.i.132-33).

What these various case histories suggest is that, in this play, self-cursing is essential to the process by which divine providence works its justice upon individuals. The pronouncement of a curse by Margaret or some other person does not in itself have a causative or magical function; it is rather a form of warning, so that the individual may see that he is fairly appraised of the consequence of his perjuries. Self-cursing is a still more heightened manifestation of this necessary foreknowledge on the part of the one who is to perpetrate evil, and is even, in a metaphorical sense, a form of contract signed between the individual and his destiny. The evil deeds range from Anne's betrayal of no one other than herself, to Hastings' vengeful conspiracy against his political enemies, to Buckingham's cool practice of political murder in the presumably safe knowledge that oaths are no more than empty words spoken to deceive. In virtually every case, an essential part of the spiritual fall is the committing of perjury, and an essential part of spiritual recognition is the acknowledgment of the perjury and the acceptance of its consequences.

Let us now turn to Richard of Gloucester, himself. What I want to illustrate here is the way in which his response to cursing and self-cursing differs at every turn from the responses of his victims, no matter how wicked some of them may have been. Richard does his best to avoid being cursed by others, including Margaret, and manages for a long time to avoid a direct pronouncement in his presence of such a curse. He is especially clever at avoiding self-cursing, until the moment of inevitable reversal finally arrives. And his belated recognition of the consequences of cursing and self-cursing brings with it not acquiescence but despair. The "coward conscience" he has despised in others becomes in him not a teacher but a nemesis.

First, let us look at the attempts of other characters to curse Richard to his face. Of course he is cursed in his absence by many persons in the play, increasingly so as the play goes on, but we also see that he goes to extraordinary lengths to avoid being cursed directly to his face. It is as though he is far more aware than the others of the dangers of hearing a curse pronounced on him. This difference is in fact wholly understandable. The others, no matter how guiltily involved, are to a greater or lesser extent blinded to their own failings and thus are in no position to understand what cursing can mean for them; or, like Buckingham, they simply do not believe in the power of cursing. Richard, whose evil is wholly without pretense or illusion, knows that his utterances are calculatedly insincere, and yet at the same *time* entertains a superstitious fear of cursing. He is a deliberate villain, then, who adopts quasi-legalistic means to avoid exposing himself to liability of outright perjury.

This tactic first manifests itself in I.iii when Queen Margaret concludes her litany of curses by turning, suitably enough, to the greatest troublemaker of them all, Richard himself. When Richard chides her for cursing in turn Edward IV, Edward V, Queen Elizabeth, Rivers, Dorset, and Hastings, and bids her be done with her "charm" -suggesting that Richard views her as indeed a witch whose potent evil is to be avoided- she retorts with her strongest curse of all:

And leave out thee? Stay, dog, for thou shalt
hear me.
(Note that the phrase "Stay dog," suggests that Richard is trying to sneak away.)
If heaven have any grievous plague in store
Exceeding those that I can wish upon thee,
O, let them keep it till thy sins be ripe,
And then hurl down their indignation
On thee, the troubler of the poor world's
peace!
The worm of conscience still begnaw thy
soul!
Thy friends suspect for traitors while thou
liv'st,
And take deep traitors for thy dearest
friends!

No sleep close up that deadly eye of thine,
Unless it be while some tormenting dream
Affrights thee with a hell of ugly devils!
Thou elvish-mark'd, abortive, rooting hog,
Thou that wast seal'd in thy nativity

The slave of nature and the son of hell!
Thou slander of thy heavy mother's womb,
Thou loathed issue of thy father's loins,

Thou rag of honor, thou detested
(I.iii.214-32)

And at this point Richard interrupts with her name, "Margaret." She, thrown off her stride, replies "Richard!" He responds "Ha!" and she replies in turn, "I call thee not."

*Richard.* I cry thee mercy then, for I did
think
That thou hadst call'd me all these bitter
names.
*Queen Margaret.* Why, so I did, but look'd
for no reply.
O, let me make the period to my curse!
*Richard* 'TIS done by me, and ends in
"Margaret."

And Queen Elizabeth ends this colloquy by observing to Margaret,

Thus have you breath'd your curse against
yourself.
(I.iii.234-39)

Richard has thus deflected Margaret's anger onto Queen Elizabeth and with a shystering quibble has avoided the "period" to Margaret's curse. It is a paltry quibble, of curse, but it does strongly suggest Richard's interest in avoiding by whatever means the technical and legal fact of a curse that would otherwise light on him and name him culprit. Another ironic effect of this exchange is that Margaret herself has now unwittingly joined those who have cursed themselves.

A further instance of this cunning evasion occurs when Richard encounters his mother, the Duchess of York, for the first *time* in the play. She has already indicated, in her conversation with her grandchildren, the son and daughter of Clarence, her realization that Richard is a vicious deceiver and a grievous cause of shame to her. She represents then, to Richard, a very real danger, a person against whom he cannot readily proceed because she is his mother, and yet one who knows him for what he really Is-unlike Anne, Hastings, Queen Elizabeth, and the rest, who are to a greater or lesser extent fooled by Richard's histrionic ability.

The Duchess of York possesses, moreover, a potent weapon for those believing in, or superstitiously fearful of, the power of cursing: a mother's blessing or her curse.

In this context, then, let us examine their first colloquy. It occurs after the death of Edward IV, when the peers of the realm are gathering to jockey for position. Richard comes in with Buckingham, Derby, Hastings, and others, sees his mother, and adopts as his first order of business the asking of her blessing:

*Richard.* Madam, my mother, I do cry you
mercy;

I did not see your Grace. Humbly on my
knee
I crave your blessing. *[Kneels.]*
*Duchess of York.* God bless thee; and put
meekness in thy breast, Love, charity, obedience, and true duty!
*Richard.* Amen!-[Aside] And make me die a
good old man!
That is the butt-end of a mother's blessing;
I marvel that her Grace did leave it out.
(II.ii.104-11)

I do not want to read this exchange with too serious a tone on Richard's part; Sir Laurence Olivier, for example, delivers Richard's aside in a mocking tone, and I would agree that a sardonic and even flippant air is more dramatically suitable than genuine concern or alarm. I would argue, however, that the sarcasm masks but does not entirely conceal an awareness on Richard's art that a mother's curse is something well avoide.

In fact, throughout the period of Richard's ascendancy to power, Richard never adopts Buckingham's easy-nd fallacious-assumption that oaths "never pass/ The lips of those that breathe them in the air." Although Richard is utterly Machiavellian in his manipulation of rhetoric, he does not fall into the self-ursing by which the others seal a contract of perjury until late in the play. In the presence of the dying Edward IV, while Buckingham, Hastings, and others use such phrases as "So thrive I and mine," "and so swear I," and "whenever I . . . God punish me . . . This do I beg of heaven," Richard is conveniently absent. Entering a short while later in the same scene, he employs a far safer form of hypothetical statement:

if any here,
By false intelligence, or wrong surmise,
Hold me a foe;
If I unwittingly, or in my rage,
Have aught committed that is hardly borne
By any in this presence, I desire
To reconcile me to his friendly peace.
(II.i.54-60)

Not, "Mar, God punish me," or "This do I beg of heaven," but I desire to reconcile me." Richard is lying, of course, but he is not signing a contract for perjury.

The odd fact is that Richard, quite unlike his later counterparts Iago and Edmund, with whom he is so often compared, is a superstitious man. He fears omens and prognostications, even if he also acts as though he will be able to circumvent those omens by the sheer force of his own wit.

Despite Richard's cleverness in avoiding for a long while the actual formulation of a curse upon himself by others or by himself, he does ultimately capitulate on both scores: he submits to the curses of his mother, and he does contractually tie his whole

success to the performing of vows he does not in fact intend to honor. How and why do these crucial reversals occur?

They come about in IV.iv, after Richard has become king, and importantly just after he has committed his most unforgivable crime, the murder of the two young princes. It is just at this point that Richard's sure control of his world begins to falter. He recalls the prophecy uttered by Henry VI that Richmond will be King, and he becomes obsessed, like Macbeth, with a plot to kill this rival and thereby alter destiny itself. He broods over the fact that he has recently visited a place called Rouge-mont, in Exeter-a name of ominous import to his superstitious mind in view of a prophecy, uttered by an Irish bard, that he will not live long after having beheld Richmond (IV.ii.95107). These divine prognostications are quite unlike those afforded Richard's victims; those persons receive warnings which they might have heeded, and later realize their mistake, whereas Richard's prognostications take the form of the announcement of unavoidable doom which Richard may try to evade by prevarications and desperate cover-up murders but which will ultimately spell his doom. That is why we can say that his credence of dreams and omens is merely superstitious in him, whereas in his victims the final acknowledgment of the truth of prophetic utterance is a sign of spiritual discovery.

Richard is then indeed superstitious and fearful of prophetic utterance, unlike the suave and assured Buckingham earlier in the play. And perhaps it is this growing fear that most of all renders Richard incapable of fending off his mother's curse as he had earlier deflected Margaret's curse with a quibble. The Duchess of York, stung into speech by the deaths of her grandchildren, resolves at last to be "copious in exclaims" and to say what must now be said. Accompanied by Queen Elizabeth, she interrupts Richard on his expedition against Buckingham, in order to arraign Richard on charges of having murdered his own kinsmen. His response is, naturally, another attempt at evasion, although of a rather desperate and crude sort: he orders his trumpets and drums to flourish and strike so that the effective words cannot be heard: "Let not the heavens hear these tell-tale women/ Rail on the Lord's anointed. Strike, I say!" (IV.iv.150-51). The Duchess is not to be denied her speech on this occasion, however, and finally the awful words are spoken:

Therefore take with thee my most grievous
curse,
Which, in the day of battle, tire thee more
Than all the complete armor that thou wear'st!
My prayers on the adverse party fight;
And there the little souls of Edward's
children
Whisper the spirits of thine enemies
And promise them success and victory.
Bloody thou art, bloody will be thy end;
Shame serves thy life and doth thy death
attend.
(II.188-96)

The language of this curse meaningfully anticipates that of the ghosts who visit Richard in his tent on the night before Bosworth Field.

The pattern of Richard's reversal cannot be completed by the Duchess' cursing, however. He must also curse himself. This he does in a desperate attempt to win from Queen Elizabeth an agreement that he be permitted to marry her daughter. The wooing scene is often compared with the earlier wooing of the Lady Anne, and indeed Richard afterwards thinks he has won this suit also because he is once again dealing with a "Relenting fool, and shallow, changing woman" (I.431). In fact, however, Queen Elizabeth remains in control throughout. What she finally exacts from Richard is the self-cursing he has never before uttered. First, he ties his whole military enterprise to the performance of his vows:

Madam, so thrive I in my enterprise
And dangerous success of bloody wars,
As I intend more good to you and yours
Than ever you or yours by me were harm'd!
(II. *236-39)*

And when this oath will not serve, since, as Queen Elizabeth acidly observes, Richard has already profaned everything else by which a man might swear, he finally throws his spiritual welfare and his very life into the bargain:

As I intend to prosper and repent,
So thrive I in my dangerous affairs
Of hostile arms! Myse!f myself confound!
Heaven and fortune bar me happy hours! Day, yield me not thy light, nor, night, thy rest!
Be opposite all planets of good luck
To my proceeding,
If, with dear heart's love,
Immaculate devotion, holy thoughts,
I tender not thy beauteous princely daughter!
(II *.397* -405)

What more binding or appropriate contract for perjury could providence require? Like Doctor Faustus, Richard has seen the dire *warning-Homo, fuge* [O man, flee!]-and yet has, as it were, set his hand to paper using his own heart's blood.

I should mention that this pattern of cursing and self-cursing appears nowhere in Shakespeare's possible sources or analogues. In *The True Tragedy of Richard III,* Richard sends Lovell as ambassador to Queen Elizabeth to gain her consent to the marriage of her daughter. In the Latin *Richardus Tertius* Richard woos the Lady Elizabeth for himself. In neither instance does he commit himself to any sort of contract for perjury. The earlier scene of Margaret's cursing and the round of self-curses pronounced by Buckingham, Hastings, and the rest in the presence of the dying King Edward, are both absent from Edward Hall's *Union of the Two Noble Families* and its

incorporated reprinting of Thomas More's *Life of Richard III.* More reports merely that in Edward's presence "as by their words appeared, each forgave other, and joined their hands together, when as it after appeared by their deeds their hearts were far asunder." [Source titles and quotes are from Geoffrey Bullough, in *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare.]*

Let me conclude by observing that Richard's *anagnorisis* is wholly unlike that of any of his victims or former partners. In a sense, he learns little in the dream sequence when he is visited in turn by the ghosts of his victims, for he has always been conscious of his own villainy and wary of the consequences of cursing. The dream sequence is more a fulfillment and choric repetition of what he has feared than a healthful revelation to Richard of God's justice. At no time does he indicate a new awareness of what providence has been intending. What he realizes instead is that "coward conscience" has the power to inflict itself on one who had wanted to believe himself free of its strictures. The theme of conscience's relevation to him is "Perjury, perjury, in the highest degree,/ Murder, stern murder, in the direst degree" (V.iii. 196-97), for which he must despair and die.

Forced at last to Judge himself by the standards embodied in those words, and obliged to concede their absolute truth, he perceives himself cut off from the curative process of penance and so goes to his death (like Macbeth) in a desperate resolve to fight the odds he now knows to be insuperable.

Shakespeare's attitude toward the power of language in this early play thus tempers concern and even pessimism with a final affirmation in the triumph of truth. Throughout the early history plays he shows us how language can be manipulated for evil purposes, not only in Richard of Gloucester, but in Joan of Are, Suffolk, Richard Plantagenet, the Bishop of Winchester, and many others. One the other hand, we also sense the vibrant power of language to invoke patriotic and moral responses, as in the ringing recital of Lord Talbot's titles, and in Henry of Richmond's oration to his army at Bosworth Field. Certainly in *Richard III* it becomes apparent at last that curses and prayers do not merely vanish into air once they are spoken, as Buckingham avers. Instead, as he himself later acknowledges, a person's words, like his deeds, become swords which an all-seeing God turns against their masters' bosoms. "Wrong hath but wrong, and blame the due of blame."

# Critical Essay #5

"Plots and Prophecies-The *Tragedy of King Richard the Third,"* in *Unconformities in Shakespeare's History Plays,* The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1982, pp. 53-71.

*[In this excerpt, Smidt focuses on prophecies in* Richard ill *She points out that while Richard is not a real prophet, he invents prophecies in order to control other characters in the play. Further, Richard is so confident in his own abilities that when he tells us what he plans to do, we know that he is likely to succeed. On the other hand, Smidt argues that Margaret's curses are powerful enough to work as genuine prophecies, without her having to act upon them. Finally, Smidt observes that dreams, prayers, and blessings in the play are often prophetic.]*

Shakespeare made liberal use of prediction in all his history plays, but never as much as in *Richard III.*

This play is a web of stated intentions, curses, prophecies, and dreams, and practically all expectations are punctually fulfilled. A. P. Rossiter [in his "The Structure of Richard the Third"] and Wolfgang Clemen [in his "Anticipation and Foreboding in Shakespeare's Early Histories"] have both admirably explored this aspect of the play, but it will still bear further scrutiny.

Only two minutes after Richard, Duke of Gloucester, has entered solus he informs us that he is 'determined to prove a villain', and, he goes on,

Plots have I laid, inductions dangerous,
By drunken prophecies, libels, and
dreams,
To set my brother Clarence and the King
In deadly hate the one against the other;
(I.i.32-5)

Richard's 'plots', 'prophecies', and 'dreams' in themselves foreshadow the mode of the remainder of the play. His pretended prophecy that a certain 'G' will be the murderer of King Edward's heirs proves more true than the victims of the deceit, Clarence and Edward, suspect, but Richard knows already, and we know, that the G stands for Gloucester and not for George. He speaks the truth though with forked tongue. And he never keeps his audience in the dark.

Richard is himself no prophet. But he is a man of iron will and unscrupulous performance coupled with exceptional gifts of persuasion and dissimulation. What he resolves to do he does, and his confidence in telling us of his intentions leaves no room for doubt that they will be carried out successfully. We know before the event that Clarence will be imprisoned and murdered (I.i.32-40, 119-20), that Richard will marry Anne (I.i.153), that he will have his revenge on Rivers, Vaughan, and Grey (I.iii.332), that something will be done 'To draw the brats of Clarence out of sight' and to get rid of

the princes in the Tower (III.v.106-8, IV.ii.61), that he will do away with Anne and woo Elizabeth (IV.ii.57-61). All this is revealed in soliloquies, and Richard further confides in us about the success of his undertakings (IV.iii.36-43). In addition, of course, he conspires with Buckingham and his more inferior associates and gives instructions to his hired assassins on two occasions. We know what will happen to Hastings if he does not fall in with Richard's plans, and we know exactly what lies and pretences Richard will use to gain the support of the citizens of London for his coronation. Practically all the plot of the play until near the end of the fourth act is contained in Richard's stated intentions.

These intentions are for the most part reinforced by Margaret's curses and prophecies, since Richard turns on those of his own side and consequently his enemies are hers. In the great cursing scene of Act I, Margaret predicts no fewer than thirteen misfortunes relating to King Edward, his son, Queen Elizabeth, her children, Rivers, Hastings, Richard, and Buckingham. There is even a certain amount of detail in her curses: King Edward is to die 'by surfeit' and the Prince of Wales by 'untimely violence', the queen is to outlive her glory and her children and see another 'decked in [her] rights'. 'The day will come', Margaret warns Elizabeth,

that thou shalt wish for me
To help thee curse this poisonous bunch
backed toad.
(I.iii.244-S)

As for Richard, she is unsparing in her depiction of punishments for him, especially, as Tillyard points out, the curse of insomnia:

If heaven have any grievous plague in store
Exceeding those that I can wish upon thee,
O let them keep it till thy sins be ripe,
And then hurl down their indignation
On thee, the troubler of the poor world's
peace!
The worm of conscience still begnaw thy
soul!
Thy friends suspect for traitors while thou
liv'st,
And take deep traitors for thy dearest
friends'
No sleep close up that deadly eye of thine,
Unless it be while some tormenting dream
Affrights thee with a hell of ugly devils!
(I.111.216-26)

Margaret's curses are no mere displays of clairvoyance but obviously potent agents in bringing about the events which she prophesies, and as they come to pass this is

recognise in turn by the victims-all but Richard. As Grey goes to his execution at Pomfret he remarks to Rivers,

Now Margaret's curse is fallen upon our
heads, When she exclaimed on Hastings, you, and I,
For standing by when Richard stabbed her
son.
(III.iii.14-16)

Similarly Hastings, Queen Elizabeth, and Buckingham all remember her words in their hour of distress, and Margaret herself tots up the score of her victories in the great lamenting scene of Act IV.

Margaret is the chief and most vociferous but by no means the only prophet and author of curses in the play. She her self is first prompted by Richard's reminder of his father's curse denounced against Margaret at the time of his death (I.iii.173-95). If 'York's dread curse prevail[ed] so much with heaven', then she must try the same means of revenge. The Duchess of York and Elizabeth take a lesson from Margaret, and the duchess utters violent imprecations against Richard to which Elizabeth says amen (IV.iv.188-98). Anne in the second scene of the tragedy curses the murderer of her husband and father-in-law and prays to God to revenge King Henry's death. Unwittingly she involves herself in her baneful wishes by hypothetically including the wife of the murderer. She remembers this when her misery is complete, just as Buckingham in the reconciliation scene swears an oath which recoils on himself and remembers it on the day of his execution. Even Richard, in the second wooing scene, swears against himself and is probably too sceptical to realise that his maledictions will be most precisely honoured:

Myself myself confound!
Heaven and fortune bar me happy hours!
Day, yield me not thy light, nor, night, thy
rest!
(IV.iv.399-401)

After his night of agony and confused awakening, the sun 'disdains to shine' on him on the day of battle. Vaughan and Hastings before being beheaded foretell the downfall of their judges. The ghosts, of course, add their full share of cursing. And Richmond, on Bosworth field, prays that he and his forces may be God's 'ministers of chastisement'.

Prayers are mostly for chastisement and revenge, and blessings are as rare in *Richard III* as Imprecations are plentiful. Clarence prays for his wife and children, the hoodwinked mayor invokes God's blessing on Richard when the latter agrees to accept the crown, Dorset exits to Brittany with the Duchess of York's benediction (she also rather futilely sends her good wishes with Anne and Elizabeth), Stanley blesses Richmond 'by attorney' from his mother, and of course the ghosts whisper encouragements to Richmond in his sleep. But the only time Richard talks of blessings is when he hypocritically craves one of his mother and makes fun of her admonishments (II.ii.l06-11).

Dreams are almost as important as curses and prayers and equally prophetic. Richard uses invented dreams to set Edward against Clarence, Clarence appropriately dreams of drowning and of being tormented in hell, Stanley dreams symbolically of being executed by Richard along with Hastings, and Richard and Richmond dream on the eve of battle of defeat and victory. Hastings sceptically laughs at Stanley's being so simple as 'to trust the mockery of unquiet slumbers' (III.ii.27) but learns to his cost that Stanley was right. And Richard, who is outwardly the least superstitious of all the characters in the play, is plagued nightly after Margaret's curse by the phantom horrors it promises. As Clemen remarks, [in his "Anticipation and Foreboding in Shakespeare's Early Histories"]. 'There is the feeling of fear and uncertainty running like a keynote through almost all the scenes of the play and finding expression in various characters and ways.' So genera is the mood of fearsome divination that even the anonymous citizens in II.iii, commenting on the death of King Edward, are inspired with prophetic forebodings.

# Critical Essay #6

A number of critics have examined the types of comedy present in *Richard III* and have speculated about why so much of it exists in what is otherwise a grim play. William E. Sheriff points out that although there are no scenes that contain "outright comedy," there are many which become comedic as the result of dramatic irony. (Dramatic irony occurs when the audience understands the real significance of a character's words or actions but the character or those around him or her do not.) Thus Richard's commiseration with Clarence as he is being led to prison in Act I, scene i, becomes comedic because Richard has just informed us that *he* is responsible for having Clarence jailed in the first place. Sheriff suggests that such humor is there to lighten what would otherwise be dry history already well-known to its Elizabethan audience.

Ronald Berman looks at the "tough, cynical, and realistic wit" of both Richard and Buckingham and concludes that while these two characters deservedly pay for their cruel self-centeredness with their lives, in the meantime they serve to illustrate certain qualities of the individual as opposed to those of society. A. P. Rossiter also takes up this issue of society versus the individual to argue that Shakespeare wrote *Richard III* as a comic history in order to express life's ambiguities rather than simply to reproduce the Tudor idea of social and historical order.

John W. Blanpied contends that Richard employs parody to control others by keeping them guessing and to hold off at least temporarily Margaret's fatal prophecies. (Parody is the use of exaggerated imitation to ridicule someone or something that was meant to be serious.)

Source: "The Grotesque Comedy of *Richard III,"* in *Studies in the Literary Imagination,* Vol. V, No.1, April, 1972, pp. 51-64.

*[Sheriff discusses Richard's wittiness and his comedic use of dramatic irony and inversion-or saying one thing and meaning its Opposite. Sheriff contends that Shakespeare made Richard appealingly funny so that his audience would remain interested in what might otherwise be a "cold-blooded" history play about Richard's accession to the throne. Sheriff further argues that Shakespeare then turned Richard into a humorless character during the last two acts of the play so that his audience would not be troubled when Richard is finally destroyed on Bosworth Field.]*

The life of Richard III had received impressive treatment in the century before Shakespeare's presentation of the man. His wickedness was held to be fact, especially as the sixteenth-century chroniclers added to each other's accounts. But Richard as a potential comic villain, a grotesque figure of diabolic wit, playing a "game" of evil action is only hinted in the chronicles and is largely Shakespeare's invention. It is Shakespeare who gives us the psychological complexity of evil and humor that is Richard in the first three acts of *Richard III.* Then the man changes, and Act IV gives us a tyrant, who lacks a twisted humor and displays too openly the evil that wit used to hide. The change is perhaps most apparent in the second wooing scene.

But why the comic at all in Shakespeare's Richard? It is true there are no scenes in the play one can call outright comedy. But there are many scenes that take on comic overtones because of the insight we have into Richard's intent and the resultant dramatic irony. [Dramatic irony occurs when the audience understands the real significance of a character's words or actions but the character or those around him do not] Shakespeare chose to use the comic to emphasize the demonic in Richard.

The element of the grotesque in this play depends on irony, which Hardin Craig [in "Shakespeare and the History Play"] sees as operating at all levels. The entire bloody career of Richard is ironic: it stopped the York succession, settled the family feud, and ended the hundred years of strife. Therefore, it is more than fitting that Shakespeare made effective use of irony in this play. The comedy and irony strengthen the drama and give reassurance of a happy ending. Since the Elizabethans knew that Richard would receive his just reward, they could enJoy what Brander Matthews [in *Shakespeare as a Playwright]* calls the "sardonic humor" of the first three acts. In his life Richard had been much like a character out of the old morality play, a figure who properly received his comedown at the end. [A morality play is a medieval drama in which abstract vices and virtues are presented in human form.] Samuel Johnson [in "General Observations on the Plays of Shakespeare"] saw in *Richard III* traces of the puppet plays in which the Devil was "lustily belaboured by old Vice." The best recent treatment of Richard as a Vice character is that by Bernard Spivack. By "a characteristic medievalism," says Spivack, [in *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil]* "destructive forces were always dramatized as grotesque or ludicrous figures." To him Richard is the Vice Deceit, who seeks "the appreciation of the audience for his dexterity."

In an excellent chapter on "Gothic Drama" [in his book *English Drama from Early Times to the Elizabethans]* A. P. Rossiter constantly shows the parallel treatment of the grotesquely comic and the sacred in Gothic art. In the works of Grunewald, Bosch, and Breugel, he notes, there is a reflection of the same medieval aspect of life as seen in the cycle plays and other forms of drama. I should like to suggest that it would be rewarding to picture Richard as a Gothic gargoyle, comic in his grotesqueness, diabolic in his leer, reminding one of hell. He poses as a Christian, prayer book in hand, between two bishops, as he plans the slaughter of innocents. He is a complete inversion of Christian discipleship. It is only by a Providence of which he has no comprehension, and quite beside his intent, that even this apostate can serve as an instrument of divine vengeance, a scourge of God to rid England of her sin. Irony becomes a necessity, for we must know the intent of Richard while those about him do not. His wit is needed to fulfill his purpose, but when that has fulfilled the limited role allowed it by Providence, his wit is shown to be myopic and inadequate. Therefore, when England has been properly scourged, his wit fails him, and he falls prey to Richmond, who arrives to right the state.

Richard is neither the tragic hero of classical stature nor completely static, for he undergoes a noticeable change when he drops his twisted comedy. He develops from a confident doer of evil to a confused and unsuccessful Machiavel [one who views politics as amoral and that any means, however unscrupulous, can justifiably be used in achieving political power] without hope. That he is conscious himself of this development I hope to show in an analysis of the play.

I particularly agree with Louis Cazamian [in *The Development of English Humor]* that Richard is a conscious actor-we know from his soliloquies that he is "clearly conscious of his inner being." Still why the need for the comic in such a portrayal? What appears to have been missed in the various commentaries, although one or two have hinted at it, is that Richard finds a perverse happiness in his diabolic scheming.

There is little humor in the early soliloquy of *III Henry VI* and in the opening soliloquy of *Richard III;* instead, there are present the self-searching utterances of an unhappy man. Richard has little of worth to the world. He is brave, but so are most of those about him. He has no beauty, not even a pleasant appearance-and Shakespeare is presenting him to an age that believed the inner self to be reflected in outer appearance. The one pleasing quality he does possess is his wit, in which he has complete confidence. Since he cannot play the game of the world about him, he will use his Wit to play his own hellish game. Yet, to those outside his private world he will appear to be engaged in their game. He will even play the Christian, the loving brother, and the protecting uncle. He will even play husband and father to the woman whose husband and father he has destroyed. He will also stand outside both worlds and comment upon the roles he plays in both; he will move both sides of the chessboard. Ironically, he will checkmate himself, for once he wins the crown he has nowhere else to go. The goal he set to be reached at the end of the game is won, and there is nothing else.

Up to this moment he is happy as he successfully makes one move after the other. Acting the role is pleasant: he puns more than any other character in the play. He cannot refrain from using double meanings that show his confidence and that congratulate himself on his own brilliance. The beauty of it is that we appreciate his accomplishment and are compelled to admire him even though the role he plays and the action it occasions are destructive. Shakespeare, however, removes any guilt we may feel in finding Richard sympathetic by presenting a different man in the final two acts. The irony in such a performance is almost unlimited, as it works on such a multiplicity of levels that it even includes the audience in the irony of being caught as both victor and victim in the same game Richard plays.

The wordplay of the opening soliloquy gives a hint (I.i.1-41). "This sun of York" is often seen as a triple pun on Edward IV as the son of York with a sun on his badge and as the brightest sun of the party in power. I suggest further wordplay in its being reflexive-that is, in also standing for Richard himself. Then his "winter of discontent" is over, and he will commence his glorious summer. Such a reading gives the subtle meaning of dissembling: he will show a merry front to the world that at the moment dances to "delightful measures." We are prepared for the role he will play before he openly informs us of it. He will make his own world and laws. Therefore, his mode of comedy will not be that of others, and we can accept it as comedy on those grounds. When Clarence arrives on the scene, Richard commands his thoughts to dive down to his soul. From this moment forward, we know his soul to be unlike any other encountered in the play.

The opening scene shows the inverted world of Richard in action. Clarence is on his way to the Tower; Lord Hastings has just been released. Both men speak their troubled minds to the man who ironically will have them destroyed in the Tower. Within ten lines

of his decisive soliloquy Richard is already playing his hellish game and thoroughly enjoying die position he maintains. He says to Clarence, "Oh, belike His Majesty hath some intent / That you shall be new-christened in the Tower" (I.i.49-50), which is an excellent example of what Wolfgang Clemen [in "Anticipation and Foreboding in Shakespeare's Early Histories"] was referring to when he spoke of the dramatic irony helping to "build up this dense tissue of foreboding hints." Further, it reassures the reader or spectator that Richard is in earnest in the role he has created, and that he is eager to plunge into it. He immediately implants in Clarence's mind the idea that it is the queen, and not the king, who has caused his arrest and the imprisonment of Lord Hastings. Then he cannot resist applauding himself for his cleverness. He adds, "We are not safe, Clarence, we are not safe"

(I.i.70). Who cannot be fascinated with such a mind?

When Clarence is out of hearing Richard remarks, "I do love thee so / That I will shortly send thy soul to Heaven. / If Heaven will take the present at our hand" (I.i.118-20). Here he begins his pose as Christian; it is good that the righteous should go to Heaven, and his own curious kind of divine providence will "help" them to their destiny. Those he loves most, brothers and nephews, should be helped along to their glory.

The following scene has occasioned more comment than any other in the play, for in it Shakespeare has stretched probability to its furthest limits. His own invention, the Richard-Anne wooing scene, has often been criticized for its artificiality. The scene can be found justifiable on the grounds that it furthers the characterization of Richard, showing the lengths to which he will go in order to obtain his aims. Shakespeare realized we had to put up with this fellow until we had him seated on the throne in order for the play to sustain interest. A cold-blooded approach to the throne, with no humor in Richard's character and, as a result, less interest, would have repeated the pattern of so many of the contemporary history plays. If Richard as a hero-villain could be made a fascinating one, what better characterization than to place him in a ludicrous situation which he could master with his particular bent of wit? Ignoring the conventional garden setting for courtly wooing, Shakespeare brilliantly uses Richard's role of inversion. He has the monstrous Richard propose to Anne over the coffin of her father-in-law who has been slain by his hand.

The point to be emphasized here is that the ritual is a mockery, in that the symbol of creation (marriage) is enacted over the symbol of destruction (the coffin). Furthering his pose as a Christian, Richard asks for charity after Anne has called him a "minister of Hell." He calls those who bear the corpse of the man he has slain "villains" and swears "by Saint Paul" to make corpses of those who disobey him (I.ii.46, 36, 41). Richard's observance of ritual prepares us for this inversion of spiritual values in Act ITI where he appears between two bishops with a prayer book in his hands.

Ritual, or not, the scene stands on its own merits in the overall structure of the play. Richard's qualities of deception, persuasion, and daring break forth. As if he were making a test run for his later great experiment on the court, he here moves carefully, calculates the counter-move of his opponent, and moves again. Where most suitors

would have shrugged and laughed off defeat, Richard in full confidence continues his "attack," coming in from this side and that until Anne accepts the ring.

A point often overlooked in this famous scene is that Anne does not completely reverse her position. She accepts the ring with the statement "To take is not to give" (I.ii.203). The "boon" he requests of her after this line is to allow him to see to the burial of Henry

VI, and this she agrees to, thankful that he has become so penitent. He then requests she bid him farewell, an her reply is guarded:

'Tis more than you deserve.
But since you teach me how to flatter you,
Imagine I have said farewell already.
(I.ii.223-25)

Her immediate exit does not allow us further insight into her mind, nor is it necessary. We need not waste sympathy upon her, for she has been taught how to flatter Richard, and to marry him is to accept his world. She does not appear again until Act IV when Shakespeare commences his change in Richard's character, and at that point we see her as a sympathetic person.

At Anne's exit Richard cannot help praising himself; he has been observing himself in this challenging situation, and he is pleased with the result:

Was ever woman in this humor wooed?
Was ever woman in this humor won?
I'll have her, but I will not keep her long.
(I.ii.228-30)

He scorns Anne for her fickle memory, that she has so soon forgot that "sweeter and lovlier gentleman, / Framed in the prodigality of nature" (I.ii.243-44), her husband that he stabbed at Tewkesbury. He becomes engrossed in his role and his success; he will study fashions and adorn his body.

In Act I, scene iii Richard expands his game to include the entire court. The absent King is sick and represented by Queen Elizabeth, who denounces Richard before his entrance ("A man that loves not me, nor none of you") and concludes "I fear our happiness is at the highest" (I.iii.13, 41). Upon this note enters the deceitful Richard, telling Hastings and Dorset that those who have spoken ill of him do him wrong:

Because I cannot flatter and speak fair,
Smile in men's faces, smooth, deceive, and
cog,
Duck with French nods and apish courtesy,
I must be held a rancorous enemy.
(I.iii.47-50)

He receives no favorable welcome from Queen Elizabeth, but when Queen Margaret enters and listens to the wrangle in the background, she gives choric comment on the dissension within the York party, until she steps forward to accuse them all 0 evil. Her curses include the entire court, but she particularly turns upon Richard. Her invective foreshadows his gnawing conscience and his tormenting dreams. However, at this point Richard begins again his play of wit:

Q. Margaret. Thou loathed Issue of thy
father's loins!
Thou rag of honor! Thou detested Gloucester. Margaret.
Q. Margaret. Richard!
G!oucester. Ha!
Q. Margaret I
call thee not.
Gloucester. 1 cry thee mercy, then, for 1 had
thought
That thou hadst caned me all these
bitter names.
Q. Margaret. Why, so 1 did, but looked for
no reply.
Oh, let me make the period to
my curse!
(I.iii.232-38)

He has befuddled her by such interruption, and her spell upon her listeners is broken. Queen Elizabeth remarks that Margaret has breathed her curse upon herself. We have another example of Richard's capacity to invert.

Queen Margaret's exit ironically gives Richard a chance to be penitent in a move parallel to the one he has made with Anne in the preceding scene. He regrets any part he had in the wrongs done to Margaret and asks God's pardon for all who helped to create her misery:

Gloucester. God pardon them that are the cause of it!
Rivers. A virtuous and a Christian-like
conclusion,
To pray for them that have
done scathe to us.
Gloucester. So do 1 *ever-[Aside]* being well
advised.
For had 1 cursed now, 1 had
cursed myself.
(1.iii.315-19)

The pose of the Christian that Richard mockingly adopts remains with him until his coronation. In his soliloquy after the court departs to attend the sick king he says:

But then I sigh, and with a piece of Scripture
Tell them that God bids us do good for evil
And thus 1 clothe my naked villainy
With old odd ends stolen out of Holy Writ,
And seem a saint when most 1 play the
devil
(I.iii.334-38)

He does not stop at stealing from the Holy Scriptures; he swears "by God's holy mother" (I.iii.306) (perhaps a joke at Margaret) in pretending repentance; and later he will use a prayer book to further his ends. Against the background of his "repentance" in this scene, the two murderers enter, and Richard arranges the death of his brother Clarence.

The following scene, which concerns the legendary vat-drowning of Clarence, is one of the most grimly ironic in the play. Inversion has followed Clarence to the Tower, and the scene is full of Christian sermonizing which Clarence never thinks to apply to himself after he has related his ominous dream of death and damnation to Brakenbury.

The Christian references which set *'Richard III* somewhat apart from the *Henry VI* trilogy continue in the next act. Edward opens the first scene as a "peacemaker," who having done a "good day's work" (II.i.l) is ready to meet his Redeemer. But although his actions have produced outward unity, the "peace" he has created is not much different from that which Richard approves and preaches. He has "set [his] friends at peace on earth" (II.i.6) and Clarence has drowned in a butt of malmsey wine. His request that the court not "dissemble" (8) ironically recalls Richard's more outrageous preaching and mockery of spiritual values.

Richard arrives on the reconciliation scene in full command of his role:
I do not know that Englishman alive
With whom my soul is any jot at odds
More than the infant that is born tonight.
I thank my God for my humility.
(11.1.69-72)

To an audience that has just witnessed the murder of Clarence, the irony in Richard's words is dramatically effective. He manages to convince the king that it was through the king's order that Clarence was executed. The king laments the times and ironically echoes his slain brother in the fear of divine vengeance: "O God, I fear Thy justice will take hold / On me, and you, and mine, and yours for this" (II.i.131-32). The inverted values have involved the king, too: his earlier warning to Rivers and Hastings is now directed at himself.

Act III concentrates on Richard's quick moves to attain the throne after the death of Edward IV. In seven fast-moving scenes which reflect the swiftness of the thought that lies behind the action, the young princes are secured in the Tower, Lord Hastings is executed, and Richard is requested to take the throne. Richard relies on only one man,

and that man is Buckingham, who according to the chronicles [Raphael Holinshed's *The Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland]* was not as eager as he appears in Shakespeare's play to be involved with Richard's schemes.

In the first scene Buckingham continues the irony of the inversion by lecturing Cardinal Bourchier that he is "Too ceremonious and traditional" (m.i.45) in insisting on sanctuary for the children. The Cardinal allows his mind to be overruled by Buckingham's logic, although he knows and has stated that it would be a deep sin to violate such sanctuary as the widow and the child have taken. Richard preaches to the prince that the youth's years have not yet exposed him to the world of deceit, to which the prince's response is, "may God keep me from false friends" (III.i.16). Later in an aside Richard informs us that "like the formal vice Iniquity / I moralize two meanings in one word" (III.i.82-83). His talk with the other nephew results in his being outwitted by a very young child. When the princes have been led to the Tower, Buckingham asks if Richard does not think the lad was incensed by his mother to make scornful remarks, and Richard, almost tossing the boy aside as being of no consequence, replies:

No doubt, no doubt. Oh, 'tis a parlous boy
Bold, quick, ingenious, forward, capable.
He is all the mother's from the top to toe.
(III.i.154-56)

A subtle change is beginning to take place in Richard's character. However, to the casual observer he is much the same as before. Hastings, still taken in by Richard, observes three scenes later:

I think there's never a man in Christendom
That can less hide his love or hate than he,
For by his face straight shall you know his heart.
(III.iv.53-55)

But Richard must resort to an obvious lie when he shows his withered arm, which all present know to have been a disfigurement from birth, and declares it to be the result of the witchcraft of Queen Elizabeth and Jane Shore. Since Shakespeare chose to present the historical scene as it was represented in the chronicles, he also had to make the decision to show Richard as being reduced to theatrics and open falsehood to gain his ends. The diabolic figure of brilliant wit of the opening scenes of the play has given way to a ruthless monster, confident in his ability to make his victims accept his pretenses, however illogical. He now dares to say:

If! Thou protector of this damned strumpet,
Tellest thou me of "if"? Thou art a traitor.
Off with his head! Now, by Saint Paul I
swear,
I will not dine until I see the same.
(III.iv.76-79)

The strawberry incident in this scene also contains comic irony. Edward Dowden [in *Shakespeare: A Critical Study of his Mind and Art]* remarks on the cynical humor throughout this conference, mainly in the manner in which Ely's strawberries are reserved until the head of Hastings is off. Charles Forker [in "Shakespeare's Chronicle Plays as Historical-Pastoral"], speaks of Richard's "little reign of terror" in the scene and the contrast between the emblematic goodness of the garden and the withered arm of Richard. Again we have inverted value in that Richard will not partake of the garden until Hastings is executed.

Two rascals-one a master and the other his disciple-produce the humor of the remainder of the act as they play together the game of double meanings, mock innocence, and false piety. As with the capers of Volpone and his servant Mosca [two characters in Ben Jonson's play *Volpone],* the comedy consists in the outrageously successful gulling of dupes. The play of deceit is introduced by Buckingham, who like Mosca has learned well from his master. Richard's failure to comprehend fully his lesson could be ominous for him, for when Richard next tries to manipulate Buckingham, the servant is shrewd enough to know when to stop.

The fifth scene shows Richard lecturing Buckingham on the arts of dissembling before the mayor and Catesby arrive. Then his old comic inversion shows again. Viewing the head of Hastings, he laments:

So dear I loved the man that I must weep.
I took him for the plainest harmless creature
That breathed upon this earth a Christian;
Made him my book, wherein my soul
recorded
The history of all her secret thoughts.
(III.v.24-28)

He has slain his confessor on earth. Successful with the mayor, Richard dives once more to hellish depths. He instructs Buckingham to spread rumors that Edward's children are bastards and that his mother had committed adultery. Brothers and nephews have been sacrifices in his black ritual; motherhood means little to him. We are quite prepared for his final act to gain the throne-his use of the church and its holy vows.

The prayer book scene should be seen in relation to the entire play: this is Richard's great moment. If he can carry off the role of the devout contemplative before the mayor and the citizens, the throne is his. The situation is critical, as Buckingham explains. Few of the citizens are in favor of Richard as their king only ten shouted in his favor when Buckingham informed them of the illegitimacy of the young princes. Therefore, the scene with the prayer book is crucial in his career.

In comparing the speeches of Buckingham and Richard, one can see that the wit of the latter far exceeds that of the former. Buckingham's lines sound prepared, rehearsed, and ritualistic. Richard's lines are studiously spontaneous, flexible, and loaded with

comic overtones. He is the comedian of the first act again, as he wins the crown. When Buckingham, in the name of England, offers him the throne, Richard is ostensibly the wooed instead of the wooer. Playing the "maid's part" (III.vii.51) as instructed by Buckingham, he gives over thirty lines of humble reasons why he cannot entertain such a thought. But in his humility he manages to produce three valid reasons why he both stays to listen to the argument and why he cannot accept the crown. He brings up the obstacle of the princes and their royal line before Buckingham does. When the charge of bastardy removes this obstacle, there is nothing for him to do as a devout and humble leader of his people but accept the crown.

The opening scene of Act IV initiates the action that results in the destruction of Richard. Lord Stanley comes to fetch Anne for the coronation, and Queen Elizabeth sends Dorset to Richmond. The next scene presents the changed Richard. It is almost a shock to find his wit overshadowed by his insecurity and his lack of humor. He is directly involved as an open participant in the reality of the court and can no longer remain hidden behind his brilliant cleverness. The first indication of this remarkable change is seen during his attempts to enlist Buckingham's aid in the murder of the princes. His innuendoes no longer carry effectiveness; he must speak openly. Shocked, Buckingham leaves the presence 0 the king but returns later to request the Earldom of Hereford promised to him earlier. The king repeatedly ignores the request and finally snaps, "I am not in the giving vein today" (IV.ii.119). Comedy occurs in a Machiavel's petulance exposing his true feelings. How foolish to act in anger. It forewarns Buckingham, who fearfully leaves the court. The Machiavel has blindly endangered himself.

When Tyrrel tells Richard of the murder of the princes, Richard prepares to court the y oung Elizabeth as a "jolly thriving wooer" (IV.iii.43 . But the comedy has grown more complex. In the ace of Queen Elizabeth's and the Duchess's accusations Richard cries:

A flourish, trumpets! Strike alarum, drums!
Let not the Heavens hear these tell-tale
women
Rail on the Lord's anointed. Strike, I say!
(IV iv.148-S0)

The Machiavel is now afraid of the Heavens, and his fears overcome him. He cannot fight with witty words; he must drown out their words with the noise of battle.

The direct coaxing of Elizabeth by Richard is not historical fact, although Holinshed has a thorough discussion of how Richard's messengers, "being men both of wit and grauitie, so persuaded the queene with great and pregnant reasons, & what with faire and large promises, that she began somewhat to relent," and finally to give in to Richard's wish that she allow her five daughters to leave sanctuary and be placed in the custody of the "rauenous woolfe." However, not only the public but the young lady herself so loathed the idea of her marriage to the king, that even with Anne out of the way, the historical Richard postponed his courtship until "he were in more quietnesse" *(Chronicles,* ITI,431).

Why does Shakespeare invent an incident and present it at some length? He gives it more than two hundred lines, some forty more than he gave to the earlier wooing of Anne. It is my op inion that he wished to balance the presentation 0 his characterization of Richard; that is, whereas he first convinced us of the powers of this monstrous comedian, he now wishes to destroy that image in order that the entire concept of Richard's character can be shattered on Bosworth Field without regret on the part of the spectator. The qualities we found fascinating in Richard, his brilliant wit, his corrupt sense of humor, his ability to stand outside the scene and watch himself, are missing in his encounter with Queen Elizabeth, and we are in this manner prepared for the concluding act of the play. Early in his confrontation with Queen Elizabeth it is she who takes over the lead from Richard, and it is in her lines we find double meanings (IV.iv.216-34). A few speeches more and we find that she has got to the heart of the matter; she recognizes that his soul is of another world (IV.iv.256-60). It is now Richard who is befuddled. He says, "Be not so hasty to confound my meaning," and later, "Come, come, you mock me. This is not the way / To win your daughter" (IV.iv.261, 284-85). At this point the dialogue reverts to Senecan stichomythia. We have a lecture on the religIOn of Richard revealed through Queen Elizabeth's questions and parries, until the moment arrives where she takes over Richard's lines and completes them in the masterful manner in which he completed those of Queen Margaret in Act I:

K. Richard. Now, by my George, my Garter,
and my crown
Q. Elizabeth. Profaned, dishonored, and the
third usurped.
K. Richard. I swear
Q. Elizabeth. By nothing, for this is no
oath.
K. Richard. Now, by the world
Q. Elizabeth. 'Tis full of thy foul
wrongs.
K. Richard. My father's death
Q. Elizabeth. Thy life hath that
dishonored.
K. Richard. Then, by myself
Q. Elizabeth. Thyself thyself
misusest.
K. Richard. Why then, by God
Q. Elizabeth. God's wrong is
most of all
(IV.iv.366-68, 374-77)

It is the comedy of a Machiavel who has been overmatched-and by a woman. His deterioration of wit is seen sharply in the remainder of the scene:

K. Richard Some light-foot friend post to
the Duke of Norfolk
Ratcliff, thyself, or Catesby-where is he?

Catesby. Here, my lord.
K. Richard. Fly to the Duke. [To Ratcliff]
Post thou to Salisbury.
When thou comest thither-[To Catesby]
Dull unmindful villain,
Why stand'st thou still, and go'st not to the
Duke?
Catesby. First, mighty sovereign, let me
know your mind.
What from your Grace I shall deliver to
him.
K. Richard. O true, good Catesby, bid him
levy straight.
The greatest strength and power he can
make,
And meet me presently at Salisbury.
(IV.iv.440-S0)

Then when Ratcliff wishes to know what he should do at Salisbury, Richard has forgotten he had told him to go there. He explains by saying, "My mind is changed, sir, my mind is changed" (IV.iv.456). And this line becomes ironic wordplay without his knowing it, the greatest irony of aU for a man who has taken such pleasure in his own Wit. Richard has developed from the brilliant comical villain of the first act to the befuddled, tragical murderer who blindly slays five "Richmonds" at Bosworth Field before being destroyed by the real Richmond.

The conclusion leaves us with comedy in two senses, neither of which was anticipated when the play began. First, as we have seen in the cases of Elizabeth and Buckingham, Richard, the deceiver, in the end has been deceived himself. His too confident trust in opportunism has caused his ultimate downfall. Disorder of the magnitude of his operation requires machinations of too obvious a nature, which he foolishly undertakes-it is the comedy of the guller being gulled. Second, we have the comedy of England's return to normalcy; the tyranny of Richard is overcome as others cease scrambling with each other for power and unite against the tyrant for a natural ordering of things.

In general the comedy of *Richard III* is different from that in the *Henry VI* trilogy where several characters were given comical treatments in various degrees. In *Richard III* the comedy is centered around the murderous king. Forker remarks that Richard "turns the acquisition of power into a monstrous private joke," and the enormity of the act in its macabre nature may have attracted Shakespeare to focus his growing ability with comedy on the one man. The comedy supports and furthers his dramatic themes dealing with weakness in high places and the dangers to the state which result, and as the dramatist developed in his handling of the English history play genre, he obviously became more adept at using comic elements to enrich his work. He dared to portray his most wicked king as his most comic king.

# Critical Essay #7

"The Dead-End Comedy of *Richard III,"* in *Time and the Artist in Shakespeare's English Histories,* Associated University Presses, 1983, pp. 85-97.

*[Blanpied asserts that Richard himself, behaving like an actor or clown, is responsible for the comedy in* Richard III. *The critic contends that for the first three acts, Richard is in control: He keeps us entertained and is able to hold off the grim, inevitable history represented by Margaret's prophecies. Blanpied also asserts that two incidents threaten Richard's comedy. One is Clarence's vivid nightmare in Act I, scene iv, which stops being a threat once Clarence is dead and unceremoniously shoved into a cask of malmsey wine. The other is the murder of the two young princes, and Blanpied points out that this grim scene occurs in Act IV; after Richard's power to attract us has begun to disintegrate.]*

Richard is a great role, as Richard himself was the first to discover in his coming-out soliloquy in 3 *Henry VI.* All his predecessors-in Shakespeare, Marlowe, More, and elsewhere-are superseded by the way theatricality is built into his character. He is "sent" into the "world," incomplete: he is not of it, has no fixed identity, no "character" but the unique freedom of the self-creating actor. It is painful-he can see that the world that rejects him is not worth having, that worldly power is a sham and worldly attachments worse than nothing-but it is also exhilarating because he alone stands undetermined by that world's laws and rhythms. In fact, he can create himself by mocking down the world. That will be his plot, the action through which he will become a character. He is not born into this plot, this role; he creates them.

He creates "history" by showing how lifeless and manipulable, how insubstantial it is in the hands of a mocking artist.

His first soliloquy in 3 *Henry VI* is the *locus classicus* [Classical source] of machiavellian theatrics: energetic performing power, the proliferation of selves through dissembling roles, in the service of an ultimate goal, the crown. But the machiavel [one who views politics as amoral and that any means; however unscrupulous, can justifiably be used in achieving political power] itself is a role in *Richard III.* It is played by Buckingham, Richard's "other self," who has mastered the "deep tragedian's" arsenal of effects as a means toward the end of worldly power. In his opening monologue Richard himself does not allude to the crown; he mentions it only glancingly after meeting Clarence, and not at all in his exuberance after seducing Anne. For two acts he scarcely considers the ends of acting. Foremost in the dramatic persona comes the self-delighting antic [Clown], for whom the world is so corrupt and stupid that the satisfactions to be gained in mocking it cannot compare with those of regarding himself, his own audience, in a glass, and descanting on his own deformity. With Buckingham, then, he begins to play for power; but even then we watch the antic playing the machiavel:

My other self, my counsel's consistory,
My oracle, my prophet, my dear cousin,

I, as a child, will go by thy direction.
(22. 151-153)

The self-delighting antic is invisible to Buckingham. In Richard he really sees himself.

The antic thrives on absolute antithesis. Richard would "undertake the death of all the world" (1. 2. 123), wants "the world for me to bustle in" (1. 1. 152), "all the world to nothing!" (1. 2. 237). It is idle to wag a finger at this anarchic individualism as if it were an embarrassment. It is his study, his pride, his art, to create himself in radical opposition to the world-meaning "history," the sum-total of everyone else's experience; to perfect himself in opposition to everything that is not himself. Such rigorous economy surely masks a powerful fantasy, bound to be exposed sooner or later, but for awhile it pleases us to be engaged by Richard's sheer performing verve. And besides, coming fresh from the clamor of *Henry VI,* we must welcome a theatrical mode that presents such deftly vivid distinctions. Probably no play was ever before pitched to its audience with such subtly knowing calculation as is *Richard III* in its opening gesture. The cool precision of Richard's rhetorical stance disavows bombast, sentimentality, vagueness; it asserts dry clarity. It gives enough of a "character" to seem fascinating, not so much as to muddy our immediate perception, or disturb the grounds of our engagement. It offers, in other words, a uniquely theatrical gratification.

The opening is a masterful tease, a great theater game; the speech is a wonderful blend of self-disclosure and self-concealment, or so it seems. Richard is bored, an unemployed actor in "this weak piping time of peace"; therefore, since he cannot have war and cannot enjoy lust, "I am determined to prove a villain." This is a coldly aesthetic aim, and curiously abstract, as if the nature of the villainy were unimportant. Like Iago, that other trickster, he is something of a *bricoleur* [jack-of-all-trades], working from available materials: if they are rotten to begin with, what can he do? At least he will make the rottenness intelligible, answerable, by shaping it as his opposition, his Not-me. He does not say "I am a villain," but "I will try myself out in the role of 'villain.'" We respond first to the fiction of intimate disclosure, privileged confidence. We respond second to the thinly hidden "self," the perhaps tortured and suffering self, seeking compensatory gratification for psychic damage, or at least a kind of suffering we can only faintly perceive. Yet the tone is cool and elegant, the theater game superb, and safe. He "reveals" a dramatic persona exclusively to us, while being sure to suggest an underlying character only slightly deployed in this action, and not accountable to it. He implies in his performing verve that his energies derive from a source other than "history," "this breathing world." He is somehow autonomous, independent, unfathomable. Yet that hidden character may be a dramatic persona, too, glimpsed "behind" the first one. Our emerging doubts about the authenticity of a "self" within these roles constitutes a third line of awareness.

Tamburlaine is obviously [Elizabethan playwright Christopher] Marlowe's darling, his speech strong because it is Marlowe's, and he consumes the world because it is so shadowy to begin with. But Richard is autonomous and self-creating (with a hint of something cogent underneath) and the world he encounters is highly organized and operates on iron and distinctive laws. Indeed, the antithesis between Richard and the

"world" takes the over-determined and fantastical form of two opposing modes of drama.

Richard's is obvious enough-a highly personal mode of aggressive mimicry, the assumption of others' voices, masks, stances, in order to mock them down. He specializes in parody-thrives on others' hypocrisy, pries open dissociations, exposes the passive will beneath aggressive language, leads his victims to the destruction, the punishment, the negation, they secretly desire. He perfects himself through furious activity, but success depends on his remaining, though Crookback and prominent, invisible. ("I would I knew thy heart," says Anne; "'Tis figured in my tongue," he replies. Unlike Tamburlaine, his tongue is not gorgeous or Senecan, except in mockery. He is always ironic, his voice never his "own" except, perhaps, in soliloquy, though even this is a cool illusion.)

The world that Richard opposes is the radical reduc tion of historical experience in the *Henry* VI plays (where no such clearly defined world exists) into a Providential drama of the most static, mechanical, and impersonal kind:

That high All-seer which I dallied with
Hath turned my feigned prayer on my head
And given in earnest what I begged in jest.
(5. 1. 20-22)

This is Buckingham, but it could be almost any of Richard's victims. Distinctions among them are tenuous, ghostly-felgned. What gives this world its peculiar unity, its definition as a play (that is, as shaped rather than "natural") is Margaret, who appears as its spokesman, and in a sense as Richard's rival dramatist. Not that she creates anything personally; her function is to reveal God's play, which she does through curses and prophecies. She appears only twice, the first time to announce the plot as a series of providential reprisals, the second to recapitulate and confirm the plot:

Edward thy son, that now is Prince of
Wales,
For Edward our son, that was Prince of
Wales,
Die in his youth by like untimely violence!
(1. 3. 198-200)

(Never mind that the violence is "like" only in being "untimely": her vision, like her speech, makes distinctions only between "mine" and "thine.")

Thy Edward he is dead, that killed my
Edward;
Thy other Edward dead, to quit my
Edward. . . .
(4. 4. 63-64)

"Here in these confines slily have I lurked," she intones, "witness" to the "dire induction" of events inexorably coming to pass. She uses the theatrical metaphor to suggest that a superior play has fulfilled itself through Richard, the scourge-of-God. What she "witnesses" is a parodic morality play in her own image: barren (gutted by a lifetime of brutality and suffering), external, mechanical, empty of personality and motivation, its single causative principle a reflex quid-pro-quo reaction, action itself conceivable only as crime, and the past *(Henry VI)* reduced to a series of crimes to be harvested in the present. The present is All Soul's Day, Judgment Day, the day when history itself is brought to an end. Margaret, in other words, "witnesses" a play about the end of playing.

What makes her so pat a rival to Richard is her very gratuitousness, her ghastly detachment, her disembodied instrumentality. Her entire character is emptied into her function as Prophet, and she is uniquely impotent as a character, incapable of acting (in either sense of the word), of withholding or depl0ying a "self" or of influencing any action. (All Richard's victims pay tribute to her power, but after the fact: they are all very eager to read their fates in her table of curses, to see the world in her quid-pro-quo terms. Clarence alone-whom she doesn't curse-experiences guilt and terror internally, rather than homiletically.) Margaret, in other words, is archetypal, Richard existential. She is (or has become) her function, bound to her language. But Richard, essenceless, has no language of his own, only parodies others', turning it back murderously upon them:

QUEEN MARGARET
[after sixteen lines of cursing]
thou detested
RICHARD
Margaret.
MARGARET
Richard!
RICHARD
Ha!
MARGARET
I call thee not.
RICHARD
I cry thee mercy then; for I did think That thou hadst called me all these bitter names.
MARGARET
Why, so I did, but looked for no reply. O, let me make the period to my curse!
RICHARD
'Tis done by me, and ends in "Margaret."
(1. 3. 232-38)

Margaret has, undeniably, a kind of brute theatrical force, though It derives from-it consummates-the tradition of declamatory assertiveness so prominent in the *Henry VI* plays, and which we discovered to be the manifestation of the self-paralyzing will that emerged as "history": the dissociation of men from their own experience. In its helplessness, its mindlessness, and its deep antipathy toward acting, Margaret's

theater-mode radically opposes Richard's, but they are yoked together. Margaret's curses have a potential power to anyone secretly sharing her outright belief in magical language-which means everyone but Richard. Buckingham, the pragmatist, knows that "curses never pass / The lips of those that breathe them in the air" (1.3. 284-85), and yet the future ghost, witness of the inexorable justice of the "high All-Seer," admits that "My hair doth stand on end to hear her curses" (303). Richard, at this, makes a truly strange response: is it simply perverse (to keep Elizabeth and the others off balance) or is it perversely non-ironic (thereby unbalancing us)? In either case, by voicing a humane sympathy for Margaret as crazed victim of the past rather than its prophet, he undercuts her authority:

I cannot blame her. By God's holy Mother,
She hath had too much wrong, and I repent
My part whereof that I have done to her.
(1. 3. 305-7)

Part of our pleasure comes from the obvious pretense that Richard is the underdog, triumphing against overwhelming odds, "all the world to nothing." He counts the obstacles between him and the crown. But they all come down quite readily, and in fact he never does seem to sweat until after he has the crown, never seems passionate or panicky in his operations. Not only is he not an underdog, but even the scrupulously over-determined structure of antitheses, of matched opposites, is spurious: the manifestation of a fantasy of power- It is not just that his victims are willingly victimized, though that is true, but also that their willingness traps Richard into a reflexive role of easy mastery that gradually hardens into a kind of slavishness. In working the ironic fulfillment of the peers' dissembling vows- "So thrive I mine!" and so forth Richard seems to fulfill his own role in Margaret's program as "hell's black intelligencer; / Only reserved their factor to buy souls / And send them thither" (4. 4. 71-73). It is precisely the pallid ease, however, with which these "souls" first dissemble and then, reflexively, suffer their reversals, that as characters makes them so shadowy, such parodic play figures, and hence such contemptible victims. Richard knows this-that is why the machiavel, who values the world he scorns, is a second-rate role. One may even imagine a Richard nauseated by his victims' compulsive will to be used, to be "shadows." Just this kind of puppetry provoked his dramatic insurgence in the first place (in 3 *Henry VI,* 3. 2), and now it appears that all his fierce ly cool manipulating energy is bound to the ultimately futile activity of making shadows of shadows.

But the play's structure is so clear, so welcome, and so brilliantly exploited for three acts by Richard that it frees our responses for pleasure in his nimbleness, and we accede to fictions we would find suspect anywhere but in a comedy. *Richard III* is not quite a comedy, but neither is it a tragedy. Typically a Shakespearean comedy proliferates confusion of plot and character with the implied promise of a wondrous resolution that delightfully enlarges the field of play in the end. *Richard III* generates the confusions, the contradictions, and through the dazzling con-man artistry of Richard seems to promise (like Falstaff [a comic character found in several of Shakespeare's plays], caught between his wit and his grossness) a marvelous payoff. But it is a pseudo-comedy, dead-end comedy. Behind the fiction of Richard versus the World lies the myth

of Richard's centrality, a center of power. The struggle is a fantasy; Margaret is a fantastic opposite, Richard's victims are ghosts, and the scenes of encounters are setups, discrete occasions for Richard's mastery of shadows all-too-willing to disappear.

This is the day wherein I wished to fall
By the false faith of him whom most I
trusted.
(5. 1. 16-17)

Behind the antithetical structure is a solipsistic need for full control.

I do not speak of Richard's need, for that would presume a psychologically complete character, whereas I think we are merely teased by the theatrical gestures of one. But through Richard-through the myth of his centrality and coherence-a fantasy of power is played out. For credibility, it needs the pseudo-comic antithetical structure. Yet this structure, and hence Richard's control, are twice severely threatened. The first occasion is Clarence's account of his dream (1. 4). Unlike Stanley's dream of the wild boar (3. 3) with its obviously flat significations, and certainly unlike Richard's ghostly visitation before Bosworth, Clarence's dream narrative gives form to an unrestrained and continuous flow of feeling. It takes its form not from a convention of moral allegory-the homiletic acceptance of one's guilt because one is found out by the cosmic polygraph-but as images vulcanized from a psyche beset by guilt and terror-The sea-vision is wondrous and ambiguous, and the stifled soul rendered with bodily directness:

often did I strive
To yield the ghost; but still the envious
flood
Stopped in my soul, and would not let it
forth
To find the empty, vast, and wand'ring air,
But smothered it within my panting bulk,
Who almost burst to belch it in the sea.
(1.4. 36.41)

Temporarily the speech is the speaker, just as the dream was the dreamer and not a discrete part in a morality. In its organic unity, and consequently in its dramatic potency, this language opposes itself both to Richard's parodic style and to the rhetorically demonstrative styles of his victims. This alternative is the rare and momentary surfacing, into haunting lyrical images, of a flow of dramatic energy that usually lies concealed within the forms it empowers, but which here, under pressure of obliteration, reveals itself. In other words, the dream narrative suggests a kind of recreative power language might have, but which is systematically smothered in *Richard III.* It does not recur. Clearly It is a kind of language that Richard cannot pervert through parody, and so it makes an independent bid for our attention and engagement that must be suppressed. Richard had warned the murderers not to let Clarence talk; now he must be both stabbed *and* drowned. The need to suppress him speaks for itself.

Clarence personally makes no special claims on us-only his voice-and Richard in the next scene performs upon Edward and the court politicians-newly "reconciled" in peace and love-with such brilliantly extravagant virtuosity that the threat seems to be turned aside. The other challenge to his control of the comic structure comes later: the murder of the young princes. Here, the play's chief way of dealing with the threat of emotional impact is to distance us from the murders. Tyrrel is hired by Richard and in turn hires Dighton and Forrest, whose account of the murder Tyrrel relays in a highly mannered monologue. This comes at a time when Richard's control, both over his own persona and over others, is disintegrating, and it shows him, now king, insulated from the world rather than bustling in it. It presses in on him, visible and immobile at the center, and his agents enact his will badly or not at all. In short, though the play maneuvers to intercept the threat of our engagement in the pathos of the princes, it also pulls away from Richard. In serving his interests-in responding to the need for central control-it exposes the nature of those interests. As in the *Henry VI* plays, but with much steeper articulation, we are disengaged and left to look with chill regard upon the helpless course of the last two acts.

It is not the "success" of Margaret's play of retributive justice-nothing due its power or authority either as drama or as idea-that leads to the debacle of the ending, but the failure of Richard's play: its internal collapse. His compulsive drive toward individuation, the clear antithetical form, has been a continuing testament to his control, but it leads ironically to a high degree of visibility. He uses up the "world"-that is, those shadows who would rather succumb to Margaret's "justice" than incriminate Richard by acting a shrewd audience. He wins the crown, that symbol of the summit of individuation. But then as a Self, rather than an exploiter of others' self-abnegations, Richard turns out to have very little force or coherence. To act directly, visibly, through one's agents, is quite different from acting invisibly through the secret wills of others.

The interview with Queen Elizabeth crystallizes Richard's exhaustion. The scene parodies his seduction of Anne, which of course was a virtuoso performance, brisk and graceful in its immaculate control. Never, before or after, was it clear that Richard really needed Anne for worldly ambitions; the success itself was certainly the point. By contrast stands his *need* for Elizabeth, which keeps him visible as an actor striving but unable to deploy himself in credible shapes of language, figured in his tongue. Moreover, he is (as artist) faced with disintegrating materials. Dissociated from his true object-Elizabeth's unseen, unknown daughter-he is forced to improvise, in Elizabeth, an agent. But he has already used her up; except for her daughter, she has nothing left to lose, to masquerade. Now it is he (as before It was Anne) who labors after a shifting target, while Elizabeth, relentlessly ironic, leads him through a mocking chase after a suitable "title" for his wooing. "There is no other way, / Unless thou couldst put on some other shape, / And not be Richard that hath done all this" (4. 4. 285-87). As the antic, Richard *has* been able to reshape himself convincingly, in role after role, throughout the play. But the strenuous effort of this interview brings him nothing but himself, "Richard that hath done all this" -that is, the historical Richard that presumably underlay his antic character all along. The disclosure leads directly into a display of incoherence among his followers, "songs of death" from the filed, then to Bosworth and Richmond.

This progress toward dramatic exhaustion, the drama's mortification by the "fixed future" of history, magnifies that in 2 *Henry VI* where York bid to refashion "history" in his own Image and ended up as its fodder. When men fail to re-create they become creatures of the chaos that, in the histories, wears the face of an orthodoxy that is both blindly aggressive and profoundly passive. Margaret's confidence is born out by the clanking machinery of the final act: the parade of ghosts declaiming Richard's outstanding debts, the reflex-insurgence of a faceless Richmond (Henry Tudor, materializing from overseas-i.e., "out there" again), the colorless correct oration of this blank hero to his troops (which exactly reverses the bookkeeping logic of Margaret's play, as in "If you do fight against your country's foes, / Your country's fat shall pay your pains the hire"), and finally the summary perfection of his closing choric speech. In other words, though Richmond thematically supersedes Margaret as the Nemesis figure, dramatically the last act recapitulates the salient features of her world-theater: strictly sequential, reactive, depersonalized, boasting off-stage authority, asserting no intrinsic force or presence. Such drama depends upon the validity of an orthodox context of belief; it would cast *us* as upholders of such a convention, repositories of its authority. If we are even half-willing to play such a role, it must be because Richard as a credible dramatic force has failed. The paralysis of his waking soliloquy shows this. It is not just that he suffers despair, but that he has no means to express his terror other than the frantic manipulation of conventional tropes [figures of speech]:

What do I fear? Myself? There's none else
by.
Richard loves Richard: that is, I am I.
Is there a murderer here? No. Yes, I am:
Then fly. What, from myself? . . .
(5. 3. 183-86)

His charismatic resurgence of energy in the end-his colorfully vicious oration and the dead-end heroics in battle-only underscores the way he has lapsed into the predetermined, the "historical" role as villain.

Richard's dramatic style, by which he remains invisible among his fellows, binds him to them as a parasite on shadows. For three acts he draws blank checks on our all-too-willing credulity. He "stays alive" theatrically so long as he does not succumb to that "historical" character that lies waiting for him like a net under an aerialist. We sustain him with our credulity, hoping that he will dance something new into being, trying to forget the dreary net beneath. The net is the orthodox providential structure of the play; Richard defies it and we cheer, but at last there is nowhere to go, no real risks have been taken and nothing new been produced, and it claims him. Curiously, the historical figure he becomes in his fall is a denial of history, at least of a meaning to history that Shakespeare has been seeking. His fall proclaims the triumph of the More-Holinshed-Tudor myth of history-of that monolithic image of the providence-driven past that Shakespeare has been resisting. Now it looks as if Shakespeare has, like Richard, been operating on the ghostyly Providence all along, as his secret security, and so has been binding his powers to it.

Peter Brook, writing of Grotowski [in *The Empty Space],* states that "the act of performance is an act of sacrifice, of sacrificing what most men prefer to hide-this is [the actor's] gift to the spectator." All the signs of such a sacrifice are in Richard's attitudes toward us-the seeming disclosure of original pain, the teasing possibility of a "moral sentience" that in defeat would make him tragic. Like any actor, but magnified, Richard seems powerful because he seems to fetch some "terrific" energy from outside the play's fictional domain and his function in it. Such an "outside" is, paradoxically, an "inside"-an interior and independent "self" that sets him apart from his fictive fellows (to whom this "self" is a ghost, invisible), and that brings him thrusting directly into our presence, a delight and a menace. When it becomes clear that Richard's is only an illusion of such energy, that it is reflected from the fictive world he mocks, that he is its antitype, and that he has no reservoir of secret strength to spend in our presence-that "he" has never been among "us" at all-then he loses his privileged power of ghostliness and becomes an interesting dramatic fiction: netted, and now either edible or analyzable. And indeed, Richard's sacrificial gestures in our direction have been ruses; the parody of intercourse enacted with Anne has been enacted with us as well. He does offer, however, no small attraction-the fantasy (which we may share for a while) of ever-expanding power exercised from an ever-unbroached, unimplicated center, requiring no relinquishing of the gratified self. It is the child's Superman vision projected into a real political world (and no doubt the idea of the artist as superman tempted Shakespeare no less than Marlowe in the brave new theater world of the early 1590s). At the center sits a hypothetical "self," extending control through murderous performance, sustaining itself on our consenting credulity, meanwhile acting to cancel all bonds, to sedate all live engagement, to gather an emptied world all to himself to bustle in. When Richard does disintegrate he discloses no hidden "self," but a set of stunted potentialities: a lack of bustle. Nothing has been sacrificed, and nothing, no "self," created.

What of our role in all this? We are flattered perhaps to analyze our responses in terms of a double-gratification: we enjoy a moral holiday in Richard's antics, and then, William Toole writes [in "The Motif of Psychic Division in *Richard III"],* "as the play progresses this faculty [moral judgment] is reawakened and we find the appropriateness of what happens to Richard appealing to our moral instincts." But I suspect our participation in the play is more complicated than this; that this is a kind of rationalized fiction of what really happens. The play inescapably mirrors its audience. The offer of a "sacrifice" by an actor to a spectator is obviously a two-way gesture, frightening as well as exhilarating to the spectator. Something is being required of us too, taken from us in exchange. At the most obvious level we are put under an obligation to think and feel in certain ways, to care, to pay attention, to keep a trust; our freedom is restricted, we are fixed and identified in a special relationship. More profoundly, it is likely that such an exchange in the theater activates its primitive powers to disturb us fundamentally. If we look we lose ourselves because we see something magical. Like Pentheus in *The Bacchae* [a play by the Greek tragedion Euripides] we both want to look and are afraid, afraid perhaps that looking in itself will entail *our* sacrifice.

We mirror Richard's sham sacrifice, his sham openness. As he pretends to reveal, we pretend to look, to protect what we see. The play becomes a screen where we and Richard are immensely pleased to enact a restricted fiction about history. We reflect his

disengagement, his self-protectiveness; in the end, our cover blown, we are expelled from the fictional space, the place of spurious magic. But we leave secretly relieved, glad not to have been asked to be more deeply moved. On the other hand, neither have we been bedazzled by the claims of the theater, and we may be sorry after all to have gotten off so well intact. Richard's own refusal to relinquish control of the play's action has kept us, in turn, free of any real responsibility of feeling for him. When he does at last lose control, he does not gain new power, there is no release of energy (as in *Richard II,* or in any of the tragedies) because there has been nothing growing and seeking the sacrificial action. In the fantasy of control that we share with Richard and with the latent performing mode of the play lies a fear of being changed, of participation in the other, the Not-me. In this mode, the object of acting is to stop others' acting; to murder the bonds of breath as Richard instructs Buckingham to "murder thy breath in middle of a word." Buckingham acts (in 3.3) to conjure support from London crowds for the murder of Hastings. In truth *we* are the prize, to control us the object of the larger performance. But we are approached by a vil1ain, the machiavel's instructor, smiling, with murder figured in his tongue: we must be sedated. Yet moral recoil is hardly warranted here, for we have shared in the process, playing our own self-protective, hence manipulating part, aggressive in our nodding passivity, refusing to mingle breath, to recreate; smiling back at the dancing clown while holding tight to our net.

# Critical Essay #8

An episode in Richard III that has caused much controversy is Act I, scene ii, where Richard successfully woos Lady Anne over the corpse of her father-in-law, Henry VI, whom Richard himself has recently murdered. Nineteenth-century critics found Anne's acquiescence incredible and Shakespeare's invention of the scene inappropriate.

On the other hand, several twentieth-century critics have defended the scene as realistic or have acknowledged its importance to the themes of the play. Harold F. Brooks, for example, remarks that Richard's "breathtaking impudence" is supported by historical accounts of him at the time, and that the scene provides an effective counterpoint to Richard's later negotiations with Queen Elizabeth for her daughter's hand in marriage. Denzell S. Smith contends that the scene proves Richard's fitness as "God's scourge" against a nation mired in civil war. In wooing Anne, Smith asserts, Richard displays his skill at manipulating people by staying one step ahead of them and by playing many different roles. Donald R. Shupe draws upon psychology to demonstrate that the scene is a realistic encounter between two different personality types. And Irene G. Dash argues that in submitting to Richard, Anne is simply behaving according to Elizabethan society's expectations of women. Rejecting any explanations for Anne's submission, A. C. Hamilton observes that in demonstrating for us Richard's villainy, the scene is not meant to be realistic; it is meant to shock us, and it succeeds.

Source: "The Credibility of the Wooing of Anne in *Richard III,"* in *Papers on Language and Literature,* Vol. VII, No.2, Spring, 1971, pp. 199-202.

*[Smith acknowledges that Richard's success in Wooing Anne has been regarded by many as "incredible" and that the scene in which it occurs has been called too brief to be realistic. Smith argues, however, that the scene becomes believable as Richard tailors his words and actions to the changes in Anne's emotions, allowing her to exhaust her anger and appealing to her "vanity and responsibility" so that he wins her sympathy.]*

That Richard even considers wooing Anne, whose husband, Edward the Prince of Wales, and father-in-law, King Henry the Sixth, he has killed, seems effrontery enough, but that he accosts her as the sole mourner in the funeral procession of the dead King and moves her from intense hatred of him to acceptance of his suit in a brief scene of 193lines seems to many readers incredible. A stylized compression of time cannot justify the scene, since the length of time represented by it is no more than the time needed to play it. Thus the question of its realism cannot be dismissed.

As one of its main points, the scene demonstrates Richard's near-diabolical p owers. As Richmond is God's minister, so Richard is God's scourge, and his ability to succeed with Anne suggests greater than mortal powers. As a lover, Richard obviously should be at a disadvantage. Ten of the forty-one lines of his opening soliloquy explain why he cannot "prove a lover." He is "curtail'd of . . . fair proportion," "cheated of feature," and "deformed, unfinish'd . . . scarce half made up." "Deformed" Richard, therefore, has

"determined to prove a villain," and the remainder of scene one exemplifies his aptness for his chosen vocation when he dissembles before his brother Clarence, whom he has had jailed. His villainy exemplified, Richard assures his audience that he must marry Aune, not for love but "for another secret close intent"; the "secret," which he does not reveal, is that Clarence appropriated the fortune of Anne, the daughter of Warwick the kingmaker, and that Richard will get this fortune if he does away with Clarence and mar *ries* Anne. What could better exemplify Richard's audacious self-confidence than to have him woo this particular woman at this particular time? And what could better suggest his near-diabolical powers than to have him succeed in that endeavor he is physically most unsuited for, so unsuited that he claims it to be the very motive of his villainy?

The trick is to persuade the auditors that Richard does succeed. Shakespeare makes the success credible through the obvious rhetorical device of forceful and emotional argument, but, more significant, rather than giving Richard but one role or *ethos* for Anne to evaluate, Shakespeare gives Richard seven. Not only does Richard suit his arguments to each role, but he changes his pose to accord with the natural progression of Anne's emotions.

Richard, in the second scene, first appears in the role of the strong, dominating man as he opportunistically seizes the initiative when he encounters the funeral procession (33-42). Just as Anne has finished cursing the murderer of Edward and Henry and considerately has told the pallbearers to rest, Richard enters and twice repeats her command to set down the corpse. He does not gainsay her, he does not stop the procession, but he takes the power from her as he forces others to do what she really wants done. When Anne vigorously condemns him, he changes his role to that of the pleader (49-82). He asks her to be charitable by permitting him a chance to acquit himself. When she continues to rant, he next becomes the innocent (89108). He tells an outright lie when he denies he slew her husband, and he refuses to answer her charge that he killed the king by explaining instead why he attacked Queen Margaret. He piously asserts that the king is better off in heaven than on earth. To this Anne can only respond that Richard is "unfit for any place but hell." Her answer provides Richard with his cue for assuming a new role, that of the brazen lover (110-37), for he replies that the fittest place for him is her bedchamber. As lover, Richard dwells on his desire for her, returning compliment for insult and tenderness for scorn. These appeals to her vanity are immediately followed by his claim that her beauty was the cause of his acts, an obvious appeal to her vanity which also shifts the guilt to her. He soon softens his pose to that of the fond delinquent who now deserves favor (138-71). That Richard's arguments have some effect is indicated by her silence, although she has a chance to reply (171), and since he has her scorn but not her remonstrance, this role is succeeded naturally by his humble and penitent role (172210). He offers her his life in an argument by alternatives which reiterates the appeal to her vanity and her responsibility. Kill me or take me up, he says as he bares his breast and hands her his sword,

for I did kill King Henry
But 'twas thy beauty that provoked me.
Nay, now dispatch; 'twas I that stabb'd young Edward

But 'twas thy heavenly face that set me on.
[179-82]

His earlier appeal to her charity bears fruit, for she refuses to kill him and, after her rage, refuses to command him to kill himself. Richard pursues the initiative he has held from the beginning and gets her to accept his ring. When he succeeds in his suit, he parts from her as the repentant (211-25) who, having "most cause to be a mourner," will bury the king before keeping his assignation with her.

Richard assumes these roles so that his posture at every turn is adapted to the natural progression of Anne's emotions. He manipulates her by permitting her first to attack him violently, as she must, by taking advantage of her natural pause as her temper runs its course so that he speaks more and she less, and by causing her to waver through the boldness of his argument and thus to succumb. He stays one step ahead of her in this natural sequence. Through an ingenious variety of roles supported by appropriate arguments. Richard responds to and helps bring about a natural-and therefore credible-emotional sequence in Anne.

# Critical Essay #9

Source: "The Wooing of Lady Anne: A Psychological Inquiry," in *Shakespeare Quarterly,* Vol. 29, No.1, Winter, 1978, pp. 28-36.

*[Shupe applies psychological theories to the Wooing of Anne in* Richard III *to prove that the scene is a realistic one. Using a scale called "Mach IV" (which rates people according to their level of Machiavellian tendencies) Shupe concludes that Richard has a "High Mach" personality and is thus able to manipulate people coolly and ruthlessly, while Anne, who responds emotionally and ethically, has a "Low Mach" personality and is therefore easily manipulated by him.]*

Early in *Richard III,* Richard, as part of his plot to win the throne, decides to marry the Lady Anne. He undertakes her wooing at what would appear to be the least propitious moment for such an enterprise, during the funeral procession for her father-in-law, Henry VI, whom Richard has murdered. Richard, already responsible for the death of her husband, could hardly be surprised at the storm of vituperation Anne pours forth when he accosts the procession. Yet, less than 180 lines after Anne's "Avaunt, thou dreadful minister of hell!" (I. ii. 46), she takes leave of Richard with the friendly and playful ines: "But since you teach me how to flatter you. / Imagine I have said farewell already" (ll. 223-24). During this time span Richard has maneuvered, lied, cajoled, chastised, flattered, and even offered up his own life to Anne.

Despite the considerable virtuosity of Richard's performance, the wooing scene has often been questioned on grounds of credibility. At best the scene has great difficulties; and an actor portraying Richard is virtually assured that his performance will be evaluated, at least in part, in terms of his success in making the scene persuasive.

In his *Shakespeare on the Stage,* William Winter said,

"Edwin Booth was the only actor I ever saw who made absolutely credible the winning of *Lady Anne;* and, as nearly as I can ascertain, from careful study and inquiry, he was the only actor of *Richard* who ever accomplished that effect." Either this represents an overly critical view of the scene's difficulty or our standards for the scene have changed-or, perhaps, the quality of acting has improved-because many modern critics regard the wooing scene as at least potentially credible. For example, Wolfgang Clemen [in his *A Commentary on Shakespeare's* Richard III] believes that "Given a good performance, we are convinced, and only when the scene is read or subsequently analysed does it seem illogical." Similarly, a reviewer [Arnold Edinborough] of the 1967 Stratford, Ontario production of *Richard III* said that the director's "interpretation even made the wooing of Lady Anne feasible, and put the play into a meaningful perspective for our times." Even though the wooing scene is now frequently viewed as credible, however, modern critics still express reservations about it in psychological terms. Thus, for example, Clemen says:

Anne's acquiescence following the dialogue between herself and Richard is bound to seem psychologically implausible according to modern standards, and critics have regarded the scene as no more than a brilliant bout of verbal fencing. But within a psychologically improbable framework Shakespeare has succeeded in achieving an effect both dramatically skilful and even humanly convincing.

The question I wish to raise is whether the wooing scene is indeed psychologically implausible by modern standards.

Richard is a Machiavellian personality type. [Machiavellianism represent the view that politics is amoral and that any means, however anscrupulous, can justifiably be used in achieving political power.] In order to obtain the throne, he is willing to lie and murder without qualm. He is cunning, ruthless, and capable of vast deception; at the same time, he is cool, aloof, and unresponsive to demands for justice and fair play. This picture of Richard is consistent with the findings of modern research concerned with the Machiavellian personality.

Stimulated by an interest in the nature of the successful manipulator, psychologist Richard Christie [with Florence L. Geis in *Studies in Machiavellianism]* has developed a scale based on statements contained in Machiavelli's *The Prince* and the *Discourses,* a scale he calls the Mach scale. One version of this scale (Mach IV) contains twenty statements, and a given subject is asked to rate the extent of his agreement or disagreement with each. The following is a sampling of the statements:
One should take action only when sure it is morally right Never tell anyone the real reason you did something unless it is useful to do so. It is Wise to flatter important people It is hard to get ahead without cutting corners here and there.

The "High Mach" personality type tends to disagree with the first statement above and agree with the others. Most of Christie's research has involved subjects, usually college students, who, having responded to the statements, have then been divided on the basis of the median score into High and Low Mach groups. The two groups are then subjected to some experimental treatment, often an interpersonal game situation. The difference between Richard III and a college student who scores above the median on Christie's Mach scale may be of great magnitude, of course. But Christie's experimental findings nevertheless illuminate important aspects of Richard's personality.

Subjects who score as High Mach personality types tend to manifest a disparaging, hostile, and cynical view of people and are surprisingly candid about themselves. Richard's scornful treatment of others, consistent with the High Mach type, hardly needs to be documented from the play. And his candor about himself is remarkable for its directness: "I am determined to prove a villain" (I. i. 30). If we extend our analysis of Richard's self-disclosure back to his role in 3 *Henry VI,* we find such statements as the following:

Why, I can smile, and murder whiles I smile,
And cry 'Content!' to that which grieves my
heart,

And wet my cheeks with artificial tears,
And frame my face to all occasions.
I can add colors to the chameleon,
Change shapes with Proteus for advantages,
And set the murderous Machiavel to school.
(III. ii. 182-85, 191-93)

Even by self-definition, Richard is a High Mach type.

The candor of the High Mach only applies, of course, when there are no reasons for dissembling. For instance, in an experiment by Ralph V. Exline, ["Visual Interaction in Relation to Machiavellianism and an Unethical Act"] in which subjects were goaded into cheating by a confederate of the experimenter and were later confronted by the experimenter for dishonesty (often with threats of intervention by the "Dean" or "Honor Council"), High Mach personality types looked the experimenter in the eye more frequently while denying the cheating and confessed to cheating less often than did Low Mach personality types.

The following is a list of behaviors research has shown to be characteristic of High Machs, all of which are exemplified by Richard in the wooing scene.

(1) The High Mach improvises innovatively. Richard chastises, lies, and denies; then he confesses, but in doing so blames his crimes on his love for Anne. He parries rancor with flattery; he soothes; he is vulgar, sweet, and kind; he offers his life to Anne, and when she refuses to dispatch him he offers to kill himself at her command. In quick succession Richard tries tack after tack with incredible facility.

(2) The High Mach takes risks. We develop such great respect for Richard's virtuosity that, even had Anne taken him up on the offer of his life, we would have expected him adroitly to sidestep and turn the occasion to his advantage. Nevertheless, we must not forget that, because of the untimely occasion, the entire situation is fraught with great risk for Richard.

What? I that killed her husband and his
father
To take her in her heart's extremest hate,
With curses in her mouth, tears in her eyes,
The bleeding witness of my hatred by,
Having God, her conscience, and these bars
against me,
And I no friends to back my suit at all
But the plain devil and dissembling looks?
(ll. 230-36)

(3) The High Mach keeps cool and avoids becoming emotionally involved. The wooing scene is highly emotional, but it is Anne who charges the atmosphere, not Richard; he

maintains a steady coolness. His responses to Anne's most vindictive curses are matter of fact, light, and flattering.

RICHARD
Why dost thou spit at me?
ANNE
Would it were mortal poison for thy sake!
RICHARD
Never came poison from so sweet a place.
ANNE
Never hung poison on a fouler toad.
Out of my sight! Thou dost infect mine
eyes.
RICHARD
Thine eyes, sweet lady, have infected mine.
(II. 144-49)

Anne is confused by Richard's behavior. She curses him, he responds with flattery; she professes hate, he vows love. Anne has every reason to hate him, but he doesn't react properly; he can't be convinced. Her confusion culminates with the pathetic "I would I knew thy heart" (l. 192). The Machiavellian personality type is at best in situations of confusion and ambiguity: "It is as if the high Machs took advantage of the general confusion produced by ambiguity to be slightly more Machiavellian than might have been astute when others had fewer distracting concerns" [Richard Christie and Florence L. Geis]. Richard's behavior creates confusion and ambiguity and thus provides an atmosphere conductive to his own ends.

Anne's behavior in the wooing scene is consistent with that of Low Mach personalities who "personalize the situation and respond primarily from an emotional-ethical orientation. They become so engrossed with the particular person or content they are dealing with that they get carried away and neglect to manipulate, implicitly assuming that fair play will prevail" [Christie and Geis]. Except for the coyness of her final remarks in the scene, Anne engages in no manipulations. She is highly emotional, deeply involved in Richard as a person; and she is quite caught up in the notions of justice and fair play.

What happens, then, when High meets Low? "High Machs manipulate more, win more, are persuaded less, persuade others more. . ." [Christie and Geis]. Highs make out better in interpersonal bargaining when three conditions are met: (a) when the interaction is face-to-face with the other person; (b) when there is latitude for improvisation; and (c) when the situation allows the arousal of emotions (for Instance, when the stakes are high). In thirteen studies in which all three of these conditions were met, Richard Christie and Florence L. Geis report that High Machs won out in all but one case. Clearly these three conditions are met in the wooing scene.

The success of the High Mach is not simply a result of his innovative and manipulative abilities; it stems in large part from his singular dedication to the achievement of an end.

He may *act* emotional or concerned, but this never interferes with his clear pursuit of an objective. He knows "how to push the limits of the possible without breaking them [Christie and Geis]." The Low Mach, on the other hand, is easily distracted and disadvantaged by his belief that fair play and reciprocity will be observed: " . . . in the process of ongoing, face-to-face interaction in which participants must follow the action and improvise responses in context, without time for private reflection, low Machs can get 'carried away' in going along with others [Christie and Geis]."

Contrary to the widely-held belief that the scene is psychologically implausible, then, we find that a psychological analysis of the personalities of Anne and Richard adds credibility an indicates again that Shakespeare was an astute observer of human qualities and relationships. Shakespeare created a scene in which a High Mach personality is involved in bargaining with a Low Mach personality, and the scene includes those conditions that research has shown will benefit the success of the High Mach personality. The high emotionality of the scene, stemming from Anne's intense hatred, has for some, no doubt, detracted from the plausibility of Richard's success. Yet it is within situations of high emotionality that the High Mach has greatest advantage.

A number of research studies have supported a two-component theory of emotion. According to this theory, in order for a person to experience emotion, two conditions must be satisfied: (a) the person must be physiologically aroused, and (b) the situation must be such that an emotional label can be attached to this arousal. If a person is physiologically aroused, say through injection of a drug, but the situation is not one the individual can label as emotion-arousing, he may feel *as if* he were emotional but not actually experience emotion. If the person is in an emotional situation but no physiological changes occur, he does not experience emotion. Similar physiological symptoms can lead to different emotional states, depending entirely upon the situation in which the individual finds himself. Thus emotions such as fear, hate, love, or joy may stem from the same or similar physiological changes, with the distinct emotion experienced depending upon the situation and a person's interpretation of it.

The wooing scene opens with the funeral procession for Anne's father-in-law. Anne is physiologically aroused and a label is easily at hand for this arousal: grief, in combination with hatred for the person responsible for the grief. Anne therefore experiences emotion. As Richard enters, Anne can easily attach the label "hatred" to her arousal and experience that emotion. If we hypothesize that later in the scene as Anne is softening toward Richard she is still physiologically aroused, what emotion would she then experience? The dead Henry has been temporarily forgotten, and Richard has diffused her intense hatred. Is it possible for a new emotional label to be attached to her feelings at that point? Could she then experience attraction for Richardeven love?

Elaine Walster [In "Passionate Love"] has developed a theory of love, based on the two-component theory of emotion, which may answer this question.

We would suggest that perhaps it does not really matter how one produces an agitated state in an individual. Stimuli that usually produce sexual arousal, gratitude, anxiety, guilt, loneliness, hatred, jealousy, or confusion may all increase one's physiological

arousal, and thus increase the intensity of his emotional experience. As long as one attributes his agitated state to passion, he should experience true passionate love. As soon as he ceases to attribute his tumultuous feelings to passion, love should die.

It is certainly not uncommon in literature for the emotions of fear, hate, love, and jealousy to be closely associated, one leading to another. Walster quotes an intriguing remark from the work of an early psychologist, H. T. Finck: [in *Romantic Love and Personal Beauty* ]

Love can only be excited by strong and vivid emotion, and it *is* almost immaterial whether these emotions are agreeable or disagreeable. The Cid wooed the proud heart of Diana Ximene, whose father he had slain, by shooting one after another of her pet pigeons. Such persons as arouse in us only weak emotions or none at all, are obviously least likely to incline us toward them. . .. Our aversion is most likely to be bestowed on individuals who, as the phrase goes, are neither 'warm' nor 'cold'; whereas impulsive, choleric people, though they may readily offend us, are just as capable of making us warmly attached to them.

Providing support for this theory is an unpublished study in which male subjects, who were led to believe they would soon receive electrical shock and were therefore presumably aroused because of this expectation, rated an attractive young woman to whom they were introduced as more likable and friendly than did a control group of subjects not expecting to receive electrical shock. The results suggest that an individual physiologically aroused may attribute his arousal, at least in part, to his reaction to another person.

But this does not explain why Anne later in the scene is sufficiently attracted to Richard to accept his ring rather than remaining repulsed by him; for repulsion is also an aroused reaction. To explain Anne's attraction toward Richard we must assume that repulsion is no longer a viable emotion toward a person who responds with flattery and vows of love, as Richard does. An important indicator is Anne's "I would I knew thy heart" (I. 192). At this point, Anne is confused (which, according to Walster, may also lead to arousal), and from this moment on her arousal may be attributed to attraction toward Richard.

The key to the credibility of this scene is its heightened emotionality. Heightened emotion is not only a condition advantageous to the success of the Machiavellian but also a condition necessary for the final change in Anne's attitude from repulsion to attraction. Consequently, the brevity of the wooing scene does not detract from its credibility but in fact adds to it: a continued state of arousal for Anne would be untenable if the scene were more prolonged.

Part of what makes Anne's conversion credible and the whole scene psychologically plausible is Anne's refusal to take Richard's life or order him to take his own. The competing p sychological theories of cognitive dissonance and of self-perception both lead to the same conclusion: that in light of Anne's refusal, her change in attitude is not only possible but likely.

The first theory postulates, among other things, that two incongruent attitudes (or a behavior and an attitude which are incongruent) will create a state called "cognitive dissonance." The discomfiture of cognitive dissonance motivates an individual to resolve an incongruity through attitude change. This theory has shown great power, not only in enabling us to interpret and predict some rather unusual laboratory findings, but also in explaining the day-to-day rationalizations people engage in when justifying decisions.

Cognitive dissonance occurs for Anne between her two speeches in the following exchanges:

RICHARD
Thine eyes, sweet lady, have infected mine.
ANNE
Would they were basilisks to strike thee
dead!
RICHARD
Lo, here I lend thee this sharp-pointed
sword,
Which if thou please to hide in this true
breast
And let the soul forth that adoreth thee,
I lay it naked to the deadly stroke
And humbly beg the death upon my knee.
Nay, do not pause: for I did kill King
Henry
But 'taws thy beauty that provoked me.
Nay, now dispatch: 'taws I that stabbed
young Edward
But 'twas thy heavenly face that set me on.
Take up the sword again, or take up me.
ANNE
*Arise,* dissembler: though I wish thy death,
I will not be thy executioner.
(II. 149-50, 174-86)

If Anne could bring herself to kill Richard, her attitudes, feelings, and behavior would be consonant and no cognitive dissonance would occur; but she cannot, nor can she directly order him to kill himself. Cognitive dissonance is therefore created, and Anne's attitude toward Richard must change to resolve this dissonance. As Richard says, she must "Take up the sword again, or take up me."

Daryl Bem [in "Self-Perception Theory"] has proposed a self-perception theory that explains many of the findings in the studies of cognitive dissonance, and does so without recourse to the hypothetical "dissonance reduction." When an individual makes a statement in a context that is free from force or inducement, we tend to credit him with the stated belief. If the individual is induced to make the statement, however, by being

coerced or rewarded in some manner, we question whether the statement reflects his true attitude. According to Bem's theory, the individual proceeds in the same way; he observes his behavior and its context, and he formulates his attitudes accordingly. Anne's refusal to kill Richard or command him to kill himself in a context where such an action seems justified would suggest to observers that she is not so unfavorably disposed toward him. According to Bem's theory, Anne would soon come to the same conclusion herself on the basis of the same evidence.

# Critical Essay #10

Most critics agree that Richard is a Machiavellian villain (Machiavellianism is a precept that considers politics amoral and claims that any means, however unscrupulous, are justified in achieving and holding onto power). They also agree that he is witty-frequently poking fun at himself as well as at his victims. But critics are divided on the nature of Richard's wickedness, on his motives, and ultimately, on his purpose in the play.

Francis Fergusson asserts that Shakespeare was not interested in exploring the psychological state of the historical Richard, but in creating a Richard for the stage who is an irresistible comic villain. Morton J. Frisch acknowledges that Richard is a fascinating character who attracts us "almost against our will." But Frisch chooses to examine Richard's motives and state of mind, and remarks that Richard's quest for power is pointless because he has no idea what he wants to do with power once he gets it. In a similar vein, Janette Dillon focuses on Richard's solitariness: She observes that he is isolated by choice because he is egotistical, ambitious, and ruthless, but that he is also forced into isolation through a "physical deformity which sets him apart from others."

Speaking from an economic rather than a psychological point of view, Paul N. Siegel calls Richard a businessman who makes frequent references to money and business on his way toward making himself king.

Finally, both E. M. W. Tillyard and Murray Krieger consider Richard an instrument rather than an instigator of the action in the play. Tillyard describes him as an agent of divine retribution whose crimes unite a divided England against a common enemy, while Krieger suggests that Richard functions as a "purge," clearing out England's guilty past to make way for the future. Krieger further argues that we are charmed by Richard and unsympathetic to most of his victims because they are hypocrites who are nearly as ambitious as he is. For further analysis of the character of Richard, see the essay by Frances Shirley in the section on LANGUAGE: OATHS, CURSES, AND PROPHESIES; and the essay by William E. Sheriff in the section on DARK COMEDY.

Source: "Richard III As Businessman," in *Shakespeare Jahrbuch,* Vol. 114, 1978, pp. 101-06.

*[In this excerpt, Siegel closely examines Richard's speeches and concludes that Richard uses the vocabulary of business in any endeavor he undertakes, whether it be planning the assassination of his brother Clarence or seeking Queen Elizabeth's blessing to marry her daughter.]*

Richard is very much of the new capitalist world. He uses the language of business and displays its attitudes throughout. Much attention has been paid to the stylization of the play's dialogue, with its stichomythia in the wooing scene of Anne, its ritualistic curses of Margaret, its chorused laments of the three queens, but little notice has been taken of

what Charles Lamb called the "sprightly colloquial" language of Richard, which acts as a counterpoint to this stylization. It is a colloquial language that often recalls the contemporary turns of phrase expressing the values of our own business civilization.

We might begin by looking at a line of images which can be called that of "the peddler and his packhorse." In his soliloquy at the end of the first scene of the play, Richard says that Edward "must not die/Until George be packed with post horse up to heaven" (1,4,145 f.). He regards Clarence as a bale of goods which he will sling over a horse's back and ship express from the kingdom of England to the kingdom of heaven. Richard's quick mind then leaps ahead to his plans after Clarence and Edward are dead, but he stops himself with the Jocular reminder: "But yet I run before my horse to market. / Clarence still breathes, Edward still lives and reigns; / When they are gone, then must I count my gains." (I, 1, 159-161) "I run before my horse to market" was a proverbial phrase meaning "I'm running ahead of myself in my eagerness" or, as Kittredge glosses it [in his *The Complete Works of Shakespeare].* "I count my chickens before they're hatched." The packhorse has to take one's goods to the market before one can make his profit. Only then, when one has carried out his plans, can he sit down to total up what he has made. The image of the peddler and his packhorse is used again when Richard says to Queen Elizabeth of his labors in behalf of her husband Edward "I was a packhorse in his great affairs" (I, 3, 121) and also, a little later, when he says in disclaiming any desire to be king, "I had rather be a peddler." (I, 3, 148) It is an image which seems to spring naturally to his lips.

Richard also frequently uses financial and monetary terms. "Repaired with double riches of content" (IV, 4,319), "advantaging their loan with interest / Of ten times double gain of happiness" (IV, 4, 323 f.), "go current from suspicion" (II, 1, 96)-that is, p ass as genuine currency without being suspected of being counterfeit-these are but a few examples. In addition to these uses of such terms and subsequent ones I shall cite, I have counted eight others. . . .

When Richard wishes to entice Elizabeth to marry her daughter to him, he tells her that, after having conquered Buckingham, he will to her daughter "retail *my* conquest won, / And she shall be sole victoress." (IV, 4, 323 f.) "Retail", derived from the earlier meaning *(OED* 1) *[OED* stands for *Oxford English Dictionary]* "to sell (goods, etc.) in small quantities", signifies *(OED* 2) "to recount or tell over again", suggesting not only relating in detail but counting and recounting money. Richard is, therefore, promising Elizabeth's daughter the joys of gaining all of England, which he represents as something to be counted out bit by bit.

Richard uses not only monetary terms but business language. He greets the men he has hired to kill Clarence with "How now, my hardy stout-resolved mates! / Are you now going to dispatch this thing?" and sends them off with "about your business straight. Go, go, dispatch." (I, 3, 339 f., 353 f.) "Dispatch" was a word with business connotations. One of Its meanings was *(OED* I, 3) "to dismiss (a person) after attending to him or his business; to settle the business and send away". This was easily extended to *(OED* I, 4) "to get rid of or dispose of (anyone) by putting to death; to make away with, kill". Richard is playing on the word: the murder of Clarence is just a little business matter to be

speedily taken care of. Clarence may try to talk them out of it, but the professional killers, enterprising free-lance forerunners of Murder, Incorporated, know their jobs (after all, "business is business") and will not allow themselves to be diverted. The word "business" in "about your business straight" suggests the same coldbloodedness as in Edmund's words in calculating his course, "A credulous father, and a brother noble. . . I see the busi ness" ( *[King Lear]* I, 2, 195-198).

Richard is twice referred to by other characters as a business agent. Buckingham, urging him before the citizens to rule in his own stead, not as the lord protector of the boy king, tells him to take on "the charge and kingly government of this your land; /

Not as protector, steward, substitute, / Or lowly factor for another's gain." (III, 7, 130-133) "Steward" meant, of course, the business manager of an estate, and "factor" meant the business agent acting in behalf of his principal. Richard, despite his public professions, was really not content to be either, but the irony is that in the last analysis a business agent is all that he is: Margaret, reciting the many deaths of guilty persons that have already occurred, says, "Richard yet lives, hell's black intelligencer, / Only reserved their factor to buy souls / And send them thither." (IV, 4, 71-73) He is the business agent of hell, buying souls and shipping them off to it.

As a businessman, Richard is, to use the language of Babbitt, a "real hustler," a "go getter." [George Babbitt is an American businessman in Sinclair Lewis's novel *Babbitt.]* He displays enormous energy from the time in 3 *Henry VI* he says that he is as one "lost in a thorny wood" from which he will "hew" his "way out with a bloody axe" (III, 2, 174-181) until the time of his last battle when he dashes frantically about calling "A horse! / My kingdom for a horse!" (V, 4, 7) Hustle and bustle characterize his behavior throughout. "Delay leads impotent and snail-paced beggary" (IV, 3, 53)-inactivity is invariably followed by bankruptcy-he exclaims, calling forth to combat. On the eve of his last battle, he says, in an attempt to regain his old zest, "Tomorrow is a busy day." (V, 3, 18) And before entering the final fray he cries out, "Come, bustle, bustle, / Caparison my horse." (V, 3, 290) His underlings in their way speak his language.

"Tut, tut, my lord, we will not stand to prate. /

Talkers are no good doers," says the First Murderer (I, 3, 349 f.), assuring him that they will not allow Clarence to engage them in conversation and move their pity. "Talk is cheap" and "time is money."

Richard's energy is the energy of the bourgeoisie. "The bourgeoisie," says *The Communist Manifesto,* "has disclosed how it came to pass that the brutal display of vigor in the Middle Ages, which reactionists so much admire, found its fitting complement in the most slothful indolence. It has been the first to show what man's activity can bring about. . . Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones." The word "business," it may be pointed out, is derived from "busyness."

With Clarence dead, says Richard, "God take King Edward to his mercy / And leave the world for me to bustle in!" (I, 1, 151 f.) The world which had been rejected by medieval otherworldliness as one of the three great temptations-"the world, the flesh, and the devil"-he welcomes as his sphere of activity, gladly relinquishing an alleged heaven to Edward. In response to Gratiano's attempt to joke away Antonio's melancholy by telling him that he has too great care for the things of this world, Antonio replies, "I hold the world but as the world, Gratiano-/ A stage where every man must playa part" (I, 1, 75-78)-a theatre with the ephemerality of the theatre in contradistinction to the eternity of heaven. But for Richard this world is all. The bourgeoisie, says *The Communist Manifesto,* "has drowned the most heavenly ecstacies of religious fervor. . . in the icy water of egotistical calculation."

# Critical Essay #11

Source: "Shakespeare's Richard III and the Soul of the Tyrant," in *Interpretation: A Journal of Political Philosophy,* Vol. 20, No.3, Spring, 1993, PI'. 275-84.

*[Frisch contrasts Richard's lust for control over other people with Caesar's ambition for greatness. He contends that unlike Caesar, Richard is not interested in the well-being of his country, in building empires, or even in achieving glory for himself. Instead, Frisch observes, Richard wants power for its own sake, and when he finally becomes king, his motivation is reduced to securing his power by killing anyone who might question his right to rule. Frisch further suggests that as the play progresses, it becomes apparent that "Richard does not really know what he wants. He does not know his own mind."]*

Caesar's many successes. . did not divert his natural spirit of enterprise and ambition to the enjoyment of what he had laboriously achieved, but served as fuel and incentive for future achievements, and begat in him plans for greater deeds and a passion for fresh glory, as though he had used up what he already had. What he felt was therefore nothing else than emulation of himself, as if he had been another man, and a sort of rivalry between what he had done and what he purposed to do.

Plutarch, *Caesar,* L VIII.3.

Shakespeare's Richard III differs from the tyrant Socrates describes in Plato's *Republic* in that he has an attractive quality about him, attractive in the sense of fascinating. There is something in the character of Richard which cannot fall to attract us almost against our will, which is all the more incredible since Richard from the outset is "determined to prove a villain" (I.i.30). The wonderfully versatile power of his mind, his talent for equivocation and ambiguity are objects of sheer fascination. Shakespeare has performed the extraordinary feat of presenting the serpentine wisdom of the tyrannic soul in such a way that it cannot fail to excite our sensibilities. In the satisfaction we receive in contemplating the character of Richard, in the various situations in which Shakespeare has shown him, it is almost as if we lose sight of the cold-blooded, calculating tyrant whose ugly soul is overshadowed and even to some extent obscured by the marvelous play of his intellect. But whatever plausible appeal Richard may have had because of the brilliant qualities of his mind dissipates when he orchestrates the murder of his young nephews Shakespeare delineates the character of the tyrannic soul in his characterization of Richard III in a more direct way than the Platonic dialogue does, for here we see the tyrant in action. Shakespeare was able to write a play in which the tyrannic soul becomes a reality rather than something which is merely the subject of conversation. The tyrant as an idea is a perfect example of limitless self-love. Richard prides himself most on his ability to deceive, to dissemble, although he is not nearly as effective on this score as he has led himself to believe. He conceives of himself, in the third part of *Henry VI,* the play which precedes this one, as someone who can prove his superiority to Machiavelli, who can accomplish feats which no one else would even attempt, so much so that the impossible becomes plausible (3 *Henry VI* III.ii.193). It seems reasonable to assume that Richard is not ignorant of the fact that

Machiavelli, who teaches rather than practices the tyrannical art, the art of deception, is more capable of dissimulation than others and therefore must be regarded as a most serious competitor for the tyrant. Richard's willingness to take on Machiavelli can therefore be understood as a challenge to the philosopher's reputed superior knowledge of political practice.

It is only too clear that the consciousness of power attending the working out of Richard's schemes is the inexorable guide of his political existence. He is driven by the restless desire of power after power, but the pleasure for him is in the pursuit rather than the mere possession of power. He is less attracted to kingship by the prospect of achieving anything with the kingship than by the exciting problems anticipated for its acquisition. Perhaps the most revealing confrontation in the entire play is that between Richard and the young Prince Edward. Edward, when he learns that he along with his younger brother is being sent to the Tower of London, indicates his unpleasant feelings about that place and asks whether Caesar had built it. He remarks, almost as an aside, that Caesar's fame has outlived his death and that death therefore makes no conquest of this conqueror (III.i.68-69, 87-88). It is obvious what the praise of Caesar implies. Caesar appears to be a model for Edward, and by bringing in Caesar, Edward introduces the thought of loftier motives than kingship or kingly power to someone whose soul has been consumed in his passion for securing the kingship. The problem for Richard is that his p assion for power has nothing further to satisfy itsel once he secures the throne. Richard is not like Caesar. He has no grand vision of empire as Caesar had. He even has no interest in regaining territories in France lost by his brother's predecessor on the throne, Henry VI. But Edward says that, if he lives long enough to be king, he will recover England's ancient right in France again (III.i.91-92).

There is certainly no reason for thinking that Richard would have been satisfied with performing the mundane tasks of rule upon receiving the crown. He was not unaware of the fact that "the golden yoke of sovereignty" imposes "a world of cares" and a "burden" on someone like himself who has little or no interest in assuming those cares and burdens (III.vii. 145, 222, 228). But nevertheless his action is animated by his obsession for securing the English crown which he looks upon as "the high imperial type of this earth's glory" (IV.iv.245). It comes best into view in his remark that "what other pleasure can the world afford [than] to command, to check, to o'erbear? [Therefore] I'll make my heaven to dream upon the crown" (3 *Henry* VIIII.ii.147, 166, 168). Prince Edward draws Richard's attention to some larger motive than the passion for kingly power by alluding to Caesar's grand vision of empire, thus moving from the petty end of Richard to the grand end of Caesar. But Richard does not leave further avenues for his lust for power beyond securing the kingship. No other pleasure comes nearer to divinity for him than this kind of pleasure. He does not have the vision to move on to greater goals.

The episode between Richard and the young Prince Edward needs further elucidation. It is quite possible that Edward's statement about Caesar creates the shadow of a doubt in Richard's mind as to his inflated opinion of his own superiority. We sense something important about the fact that Richard does not hesitate to proclaim his superiority to Machiavelli, but not to Caesar. No difference between Richard and Caesar is more telling than that which is revealed in Richard's speech to his army before the final battle

at Bosworth Field. He refers to "these bastard Bretons, whom our fathers have in their own land beaten, bobb'd, and thump'd, and, in record left them the heirs of shame," but never once does he consider the possibility of regaining England's lost territories in France (V.iii. 334-36). It is Edward's concentration on militaristic honor that leads him to emphasize a return to France. It is not impossible that Edward, after recovering England's lost territories in France, would have harbored hopes of conquering all of France, thus securing the union of France and England under the crown of England. He clearly has a vision which could easily transform itself into imperialism.

Edward is devoted to militaristic honor and hence to foreign war and conquest. He has presumably read Caesar's *Commentaries,* an account which, in his opinion, would make Caesar's fame immortal. He even goes so far as to suggest that it is the wit and wisdom encapsulated in those commentaries which make Caesar's valor live (III.i.86). Caesar's greatness will be admired and praised by many generations after his death. It goes without saying that Shakespeare made Richard III immortal, but Caesar made himself immortal first through his exploits and then through his commentaries. Caesar evidently wanted to be remembered long after his death. It is for this reason that he was constantly seeking to outdo his past accomplishments with greater and greater deeds, but the highest part of his greatness was his commentaries. His greatness is more spectacular because of his commentaries. Caesar did not need a Shakespeare to embellish his greatness. Richard receives his fame at the hands of Shakespeare, the fame of infamy, but an infamy which becomes a substitute for oblivion. The young Prince Edward's praise of Caesar makes Richard appear low.

The contrast between Richard and Caesar is perhaps nowhere more clearly seen than in reading Plutarch's characterization of Julius Caesar. Plutarch says that Caesar competed with himself to outdo himself, driven by his "plans for greater deeds [than he had already accomplished] and a passion for fresh glory, as though he had used up what he already had. What he felt was therefore nothing else than emulation of himself, as if he had been another man, and a sort of rivalry between what he had done and what he purposed to do" (Plutarch, *Caesar,* L VIII.3). Shakespeare's Richard, by way of contrast, means to prove himself to himself by overpowering others, but apparently lacks that further incentive to compete with himself, to outdo himself. He soliloquizes in order to assure himself of his own superiority. His recurrent soliloquies (with the exception of the last) can be construed therefore as exercises in self-assurance in order to reinforce his sense of his own absolute worth. He is absolutely convinced in his own mind that he will be able to capture the English throne no matter how difficult that task might be, but altogether missing is the incentive or the will to compete with himself by establishing any further goals beyond that. The securing of the English throne somehow marks the limit of his aspirations. He lacks the incentive or the desire to set new goals for himself. He is constrained by the narrowness of his vision.

It is true that Richard thinks he can accomplish almost anything, but only within the narrow confines of maneuvering his way to the crown. He has no interest in the burdens of statecraft or the pursuit of empire. Richard gives us to understand that he has the power of going to any length in contriving anything, employing only speech, only persuasion (3 *Henry* VIIII.ii.182-93). He accomplishes feats which no one else would

even think of attempting, like wooing Lady Anne in the presence of the corpse of her murdered husband's murdered father, both of whom he had admittedly murdered. Who would ever think that she could be maneuvered into the intolerable position of having to live with a second husband responsible for her first husband's death? He glories in the sweetness of his triumph over Anne. But he overestimates his own abilities, for his deceitfulness and deviousness are rather transparent to those who know him well. He may be able to break down the walls of Anne's restraint, but the former Queen Elizabeth is not taken in by the pretense of his profession of love for her daughter, the Princess Elizabeth. She feigns a reluctant acquiescence to his proposal of marriage to her daughter which has Richard convinced that he has won her support. It would be fair to assume that Richard deceives himself into thinking that Elizabeth is convinced of his sincerity. He appears to have no sense of his own limitations. He cannot see himself correctly.

Richard hardly ever lets his conscience get the better of him, but his conscience asserts itself in his sleep when the spirits of those he has murdered or arranged to have murdered appear to him in a dream. This cold, unmoving rock of a man, claiming as he does that he fears neither heaven nor hell, finally dissolves under the pressure of conscience, brought on by the burden of a troubled soul (V.iii.179-204). He claims that he is not touched by conscience, but the moment he is willing to admit that his "coward conscience" inspires him with fear, he does not seem to be the same Richard as before (V.iii.179). There is a decided difference in tone, for Richard is only Richard without a conscience. But even before this admittedly frightful encounter, Lady Anne, now his wife, reveals that she had never spent a restful night in his bed without being awakened by his frightful or timorous dreams (IV.i.82-84). We are left wondering whether he had had previous encounters with the conscience he scorns and despises in the timorous dreams which only his wife is able to bring to our attention. The former Queen Margaret, addressing Richard earlier in the play, prophesizes that "no sleep [will] close that deadly eye of thine unless it be while some tormenting dream affrights thee with a hell of ugly devils," but we are given no more information than that (I.iii.225-57). It seems not improbable at all that Richard is plagued nightly after Margaret's curse by the tormenting dreams she prophesizes, for when contemplating the murder of the young princes, he refers to them as "foes to my rest and my sweet dream's disturbers" (IV.ii.72). What might have caused him to sleep uneasily was the anxiety brought about by his memory of the prophecies of Henry VI and a bard of Ireland that Richmond would be "likely in time to bless the regal throne" (3 *Henry VI* IV.vi.74), and that he would not live long after he saw Richmond (IV.ii.94-96, 104-5).

Richard successfully conceals his nightmares for a long time. He rarely mentions his troubling dreams prior to the one nightmare which almost completely unnerves him. One may surmise that he suppresses them, but whatever one's conclusion on that, it seems evident that he does not tell us everything that goes on in his thoughts. The dark shadow of guilt, dimly perceived in the deepest recesses of his soul, does not appear to surface until toward the end of the play. He does not have to face up to the horror of his catalogue of crimes until the visitation of the spirits of his victims at that time. He awakens to conscience only after he is cursed by the ghosts of his murdered victims.

Richard seems willing to acknowledge the power of conscience as he attempts to defy it, for in his remarks to his retinue made shortly after his dream, he says that "conscience is but a word which cowards use, devised at first to keep the strong in awe" (V.iii.310-11). He had never dreamed it possible that his conscience could get under his skin, but he is evidently intimidated by the power of conscience. By his own admission, he is at war with his conscience. Conscience is a diabolical enemy to be overcome. The action of the play moves between Richard's announcement in the opening scene of his determination to prove himself a villain and the eventual realization, after the ghosts of those murdered ones appear to him in a dream, that he is a villain (V.iii.192). The promise that he made to himself to prove himself a villain, the desire for his own perfection as a villain, has been fulfilled. It is a moment of frightened self-awareness in which he confesses to himself that he hates himself for the hateful deeds he has committed (V.iii.190-91). He is stricken with remorse. He almost completely loses his presence of mind, crying to Jesus for mercy (V.iii.179). Richard, who refuses to recognize the existence of conscience, gives himself over to the terrible tortures of conscience, but one cannot say that he was restrained by conscience.

It can be shown that the love of honor is a possible remedy for the misuse of political power, for the desire for recognition makes it possible for rulers to perform selfless acts for selfish reasons; but it is not a sufficient corrective, since the appeal to honor must be perfected by being in the service of something far more exalted than honor. We are led to reflect on the possibility of Richard III becoming a beneficent tyrant, but there is absolutely no suggestion that he could have become that, inasmuch as he reveals a remarkable indifference to honor and praise and therefore lacks the incentive to measure up to some standard of praise. He apparently has no need for recognition from others. It seems evident that there is no potential for goodness in Richard Plantagenet. It would be accurate to say that Shakespeare's characterization of Richard goes a long way toward showing the impossibility of transforming the soul of the tyrant into something fine. One cannot fancy Shakespeare, from the standpoint from which he viewed the actions of the unjust tyrannical soul, holding the View that the correction of tyranny is possible through the conversion of the tyrant from badness to goodness. Shakespeare did not consider Richard perfectible, his last soliloquy notwithstanding.

Richard III is the only one of Shakespeare's kings explicitly associated with Machiavelli. Machiavelli may not be Shakespeare's model of a philosopher, but he is the only philosopher to whom Richard could conceivably relate. Richard knows without having to be reminded that he is not a philosopher in spite of his offer in 3 *Henry VI* to take Machiavelli to school. It can hardly be said that he is reflective. We obviously cannot take seriously Buckingham's characterization of Richard as someone bent on meditation and contemplation in the interest of his soul rather than having an interest in wordly pursuits, for that is simply a ploy to feign a reluctance on Richard's part to accept an offer of the crown (III.vii.72, 74, 76). It is not the contemplative life to which Richard turns. The most that we can expect from him in a reflective posture is that he derives delight from contemplating his shadow in the sun, his own projected image of himself (I.i.25-26; ii.26768). The fact that he mentions Machiavelli does not prove that there is anything philosophic in him, but it should not surprise us that practitioners of politics are for the most part defective in theoretical understanding.

We are always confronted with tyrants and, incredible as it may seem, they continue to be a subject of peculiar fascination and attractiveness by virtue of their remarkable capacity for ruse and deception.

Richard wishes to prove himself best, but only to his own satisfaction. He is not at all concerned with being admired or praised by others. Self-admiration or self-satisfaction does not have to be confirmed by the admiration of others, but without the acclaim of others, Richard can only prove himself best to himself by overpowering others. The intensity of his will to power is clearly manifested in his remark that, if the crown were further off than it is, he would still pluck it down, but more than that the very impossibility of the enterprise becomes a supreme challenge to him (3 *Henry VI* III.ii.194-95). It is hardly neces sary to say that the work of the true statesman is to raise politics to its highest possible level, but Richard does not possess the moral equipment necessary to make Englishmen good citizens of England, inasmuch as he cannot be presumed to be guided by any concern with the common good. His statement that he is "unfit for state and majesty" is truer than he realizes (III.vii.204). This greatest of English tyrants attempts in Machiavellian fashion to set aside the moral order of the world through a policy of ruse, treachery, and murder. His ruthless statesmanship, a calculated ruthlessness characteristic of Machiavelli, succeeds in acquiring kingly power, and in preserving it for so short a time, but his vow to outdo Machiavelli never comes to pass. It appears to be a vauntingly ambitious claim to a superiority which could not be achieved, for he has hardly been crowned before his house of cards begins to collapse. He cannot maintain the sovereignty he has so recently acquired (IV .ii.60-61). There is no indication that Richard could ever rule England.

*Richard III* is the most exclusively political of Shakespeare's history plays. The tragic history of Richard III is not simply the tragic history of England consumed in a civil war, the War of the Roses, England's greatest disaster, but an attempt to sharpen our sense of the potential for tragedy in political life through the depiction of the actions of an unjust tyrannical ruler. The murder of the young princes, a deed which is unqualifiedly evil, exceeds the greatest cruelties of the War of the Roses and shows how ugly or deformed a tyrant's soul can be. Shakespeare does not say so in so many words, but it would be reasonable to assume that he believed that the responsible exercise of political power, the rule of wisdom with its very strict standards, is seldom available to political society. The rule of wisdom is very difficult to achieve. Henry V represented England's finest hour, but in a very short time, the horror of the War of the Roses, culminating in the tyranny bred by these civil dissensions, and the resurrection of that regime out of the long madness that had scarred England, would be succeeded only by a future fraught with uncertainty.

It would seem that the potentiality for absolute evil in human affairs is too great to expect a transformation of the harshness of political life.

There is simply no sufficient explanation for the villainy of Richard, inasmuch as he is not really interested in being burdened with the responsibilities of a sovereign. He proves indifferent to the responsibilities of power other than its retention. One would be hard pressed therefore to argue that his villainy derives mainly from his desire to reign

as king. Richard is much more of a schemer than an opportunist. He has an irresistible impulse to manipulate. It would seem that villainy has become an end in itself, that is, that the means to an end which is not really an end has supplanted the end and become an end in itself. It seems almost Impossible to suppose that what Richard has in mind is simply to prove himself a villain, to live for nothing except the need to assert himself violently, unless of course it is intended as a test of his mettle. But there can be little doubt that Richard is much happier when he is seeking the throne than after he possesses it, for what gives him most pleasure is the expectation of a satisfaction which is always and essentially in the future rather than the reality of that satisfaction. We can say therefore that the pursuit is more enjoyable for him than the attainment of the end, but that enjoyment ceases once the object of the pursuit is obtained. It is not hard to understand that the motivation which had spurred Richard on to his course of action is no longer there once he becomes king. Richard of Gloucester plotting to take the throne is in his element, but as king he is reduced to merely securing his position. He cannot enjoy his power.

But however we are to understand Richard's motives, it is certainly most significant that, when he realizes that he is a villain, he is appalled at the very thought. The nightmare has now fully invaded his consciousness. In the most astounding of turnabouts, he faces up to his own villainy in his monologue after his dream, but it is too late to seek his own salvation. Richard is what he is by virtue of the character of his actions. He does not have the means to correct himself. He defined himself with precision earlier on when he said, "I am in so far in blood that sin will pluck on sin" (IV.iv.63-64). He is imprisoned by his own treachery. His astonishing statement that he hates himself must be taken at its face value, although nothing in his previous experience can account for the sentiment he now experiences. He apparently does not like what he sees in himself. He is not even sure of his villain's role any more. It almost borders on self-contempt. It certainly seems that his conscience takes the heart out of him, but it would be a gross overstatement to say that Richard is repentant. It would be more accurate to say that he is ambivalent, for he both affirms and denies his guilt virtually in the same breath.

Richard, for some reason that we never learn, blurts out that he hates himself for the hateful deeds he has committed. It is at first impossible to believe that one who is so apparently convinced of his own superiority would ever experience such a sudden change of attitude toward himself. We have no indication from any of his previous remarks that he ever entertained any misgivings concerning his conduct, but this in no sense implies that he did not harbor some silent doubts. Why should the mere appearance of apparitions in a dream induce him to change his estimate of himself, unless of course they were in fact conjured up by his own imagination in order to create a confrontation with himself? Richard might have intended to seek from such a confrontation an exoneration of his consciousness of his own guilt. By concealing, or leaving to inference, this side of Richard, Shakespeare leaves to be figured out the reasoning by which he led himself to think of himself as deeply immoral. His reasoning remains unknown to us, leaving us wondering what he had in mind. It is altogether possible that Shakespeare wanted to tell us that conscience is a force to be reckoned with in a conscience-ridden world, and that even someone as impervious to conscience as Richard cannot extricate himself altogether from that moral consciousness. We are

confronted with a tyrant who, at least momentarily, is out of heart with tyranny, who has just declared that he hates himself for the hateful deeds he has committed. Shakespeare's play shows that a tyrant who lacks both goodness and conscience, one could even say that goodness goes against his grain, nevertheless recognizes himself as a hateful creature, because he does not know how to be altogether evil.

Richard's greatest passion as it appears is to manipulate or overpower others. It hardly needs to be said that it is in the nature of the desire for power that it can never be fulfilled. The desire for power must feed upon more power. The pursuit can be satisfying only as long as the end recedes, and unless the end is continuously redefined, the pursuit will be over and the satisfaction will cease. Richard thought that he wanted to become king, but what he really wanted was to prove himself capable of becoming king. The effort is everything for him; the result is inconsequential. The pursuit of power or the tyrant's activity has no end other than more power, which is precisely Richard's problem. There is a certain reasonableness in Richard's actions, inasmuch as it is not unreasonable for a prince of the realm to think in terms of his possible succession to the throne, but that is where his reasonableness ends, for the objective itself is unimportant to him. Shakespeare demonstrates, through his treatment of tyranny, a clear awareness of the delusions of power, that there is no inherent satisfaction in satisfying the desire for more, since there is no end in view. The end is endless.

We have seen that Richard is more interested in proving himself capable of becoming king than in performing the role of a ruler, but more than that he is unable to see that he was striving for something that he never really wanted. He only thought that he wanted to be king. It is conceivable that his wish to be king is simply a projection of his youthful wish for his father, the Duke of York, to become king. In the third part of *Henry VI,* the young Richard tries to convince his father to seize the crown, saying: "And, father, do but think how sweet it is to wear a crown," and only after his father's death does he say that he would make his heaven to dream upon the crown (3 *Henry VI* I.ii.2829; III.iii.168). There can be little doubt that Richard thinks he wants the crown, but he can have been projecting what was originally a wish for his father without giving little more than a thought to what is actually involved in performing the functions of kingship. He has no interest in that kind of thing, but he never abandons his youthful addiction to the crown. Shakespeare seems merely to attempt to show that Richard seeks to be king, but in the course of the play it becomes quite clear that Richard does not really know what he wants. He does not know his own mind.

It must above all be emphasized that, from Shakespeare's point of view, the soul of the tyrant, given its highest expression in this play, represents the darker side of human nature, exhibiting qualities residing in the human character itself. It is even conceivable that the gulf which separates Richard Plantagenet from the rest of the world is not as great as might be imagined at first appearance- Shakespeare's absorption in the character of Richard which emerges from the soliloquies he has written for him reveals a remarkable sensitivity to that possibility. Richard represents a disposition by no means uncommon if we are to take seriously Socrates' remark that "surely some terrible, savage and lawless form of desires is in every man, even in some of us who seem to be ever so measured" (plato, *Republic,* 572b). It would seem as though Shakespeare

wanted to show utter depravity as it might be experienced in a human soul, the soul of a tyrant; revealing the inadequacy of the tyrant's conception of what constitutes human happiness, and all that this implies for the human condition. It would be a real question for Shakespeare whether everyone seeks to have more, to overreach others, as his later contemporary, Thomas Hobbes, was to maintain.

# Critical Essay #12

Critics have studied the women in *Richard III* for their significance both as individuals and as a group. Madonne M. Miner, for example, focuses on the play's misogyny (the hatred of women), stating that Richard continually blames women instead of accepting the guilt which is really his own. Miner and Irene G. Dash also discuss the women's role as "ciphers" or "non-persons," especially after they become widows and their sole source of power and of social identity-their husbands-is gone. Both critics note a positive element of women's fate in the play: Through their adversity, the women eventually identify with each other and unite against Richard.

Taken individually, the four women each pose certain problems for critics. E. M. W. Tillyard regrets that Shakespeare included the scene (Act IV, scene iv) in which Richard asks for Queen Elizabeth's blessing to marry her daughter. Tillyard states that Elizabeth's weak submission to Richard serves no purpose, coming as it does toward the end of the play. In contrast, Dash and Stephen L. Tanner contend that Elizabeth does not submit, but in fact wins this battle of wits, and Tanner maintains that her victory signals Richard's fall from power.

Lady Anne has also been criticized for submitting to Richard. David Bevington refers to Richard's "outlandishly successful" wooing of Anne, and regards her acquiescence as an enormous "betrayal of self." While Dash defends Anne's behavior, observing that she had little choice but to submit to King Edward's brother, she also describes Anne as the most conventional and "self-deprecating" woman in the play.

David Ritchey calls Margaret "a formidable and warlike creature." Harold F. Brooks comments that Margaret appears in all three of the *Henry VI* plays and is important as a connecting link between them and *Richard III,* and as an embodiment of vengeance against Richard. Dash states that Margaret is often left out of productions of *Richard III,* and Dash argues that this omission "affects the total impact of the play," for Margaret's speeches emphasize her own anomalous position as Henry VI's widow and prophesy the fate of the other women in the play.

The Duchess of York-Richard's mother-has not received as much critical attention as have the other women in the play- A. C. Hamilton and Madonne M. Miner, however, both discuss the scene (Act IV, scene iv) in which Margaret and Elizabeth teach the Duchess how to curse so that she can condemn her son. Hamilton remarks that before this scene, the Duchess had been mostly quiet-resigned to her misery. For further analysis of the character of Margaret, see the essay Frances Shirley in the LANGUAGE: OATHS, CURSES, AND PROPHESIES section; and the essay by A. C. Hamilton in the OVERVIEWS section. For further analysis of the character of Anne, see the essays by Denzell S. Smith and Donald R. Shupe in the WOOING section.

Source: "'Neither Mother, Wife, nor England's Queen': The Roles of Women in *Richard III,"* in *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare,* edited by Carolyn Ruth

Swift Lenz, Gayle Greene, and Carol Thomas Neely, University of Illinois Press, 1980, pp. 35-55.

*[Miner addresses the misogyny that occurs in* Richard III *and how it affects Anne, Margaret, the Duchess of York, and Queen Elizabeth. The critic points out that women are used as "scapegoats." Miner also observes that in the play women are dependent upon men for their roles in life, so that when Richard kills King Henry VI and his son, Edward (in an earlier play), Margaret ceases to be a wife, mother, or queen. Miner further remarks that Richard debases women by misusing the metaphors of pregnancy and birth. Miner concludes by asserting that there is a positive aspect to* Richard III: *after suffering injustice from Richard, the women draw closer to one another.]*

*Richard III* opens with a soliloquy, in which Richard, Duke of Gloucester, distinguishes time past, time present, and what he perceives to be time future:

Grim-visaged War hath smoothed his
wrinkled front,
And now, instead of mounting barbed steeds
To fright the souls of fearful adversaries,
He capers nimbly in a lady's chamber
To the lascivious pleasing of a lute.
Why, I, in this weak-piping time of peace,
Have no delight to pass away the time.
And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover
To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
I am determined to prove a villain.
(I.i.9-13, 24-25, 28-30)

Out of step with his time, Richard determines to force it into closer conformity with his own nature.

Implicitly, the quality of the present which Richard finds so onerous is its femininity; present days belong to "wanton ambling nymphs," not to marching warriors, not to hunchbacked younger brothers. The opposition between war and peace is expressed as opposition between male and female; "male" is associated with "bruised arms,"_ "stern alarums,"' and "barbed steeds,"_ and "female" with "merry meetings,", "delightful measures,"' and "sportive tricks." It makes no difference whether we agree or disagree with Richard's sexual collocations; what is of importance is Richard's exclusive identification with one side of the antithesis and his determination to obliterate those who represent the opposite-those who, according to the imagery of Richard's soliloquy, are women.

**In** addition to introducing the poles of opposition in *Richard III,* Gloucester's opening soliloquy also introduces a tactic that Richard employs throughout: an allocation of guilt along sexual lines so that women are invariably at fault. Within the soliloquy it is apparent that women are to blame for effacing the countenance of "Grim-visaged War" and, immediately following the soliloquy, Richard explains to brother Clarence that

women are to blame for other things as well. Even though Richard has just told us that he has spun "inductions dangerous" so as to set Clarence and Edward "in deadly hate the one against the other,"' when Clarence enters, under guard, Richard maintains that women are at the root of his woes:

Why, this It is when men are ruled by
women.
'Tis not the king that sends you to the
Tower. My Lady Grey his wife, Clarence, 'tis she
That tempers him to this extremity.
(I.i.62-65)

Richard's allegation not only deflects suspicion from himself and onto Elizabeth, but also tends to unite the two brothers against an intruder (the sister-in-law, the "Other"). While challenging bonds of marriage, Richard appears to be reaffirming bonds of consanguinity. Clarence catches the impulse of Richard's comment and carries it yet further, naming Mistress Shore as another female force undermining the throne; if one woman is not to blame, another may be found. Clarence cites Shore's intervention in favor of Hastings and Richard agrees: "Humbly complaining to her deity / Got my Lord Chamberlain his liberty" (I.i.76-77). Obviously, according to Richard, when prostitutes capture the ear of kings, when wives wield more power than brothers, the time is out of joint.

In the subsequent exchange with Anne, who follows the corpse of her father-in-law Henry to Chertsey, as in that with Clarence, Richard directs culpability from himself and onto the female figure. He greets the recently widowed woman as "sweet saint" (I.ii.49), and bolsters this greeting with a string of compliments, to which she responds with curses. When Anne charges him with the slaughter of her father-in-law, Henry VI, and her husband, Edward, Richard initially scrambles for a surrogate (blaming Edward IV and Margaret) but then hits upon a far more effective line, accusing Anne as the primary "causer" of the deaths:

Your beauty was the cause of that effect;
Your beauty, that did haunt me in my sleep
To undertake the death of all the world,
So I might live one hour in your sweet
bosom.
(I.ii.121-24)

Thus, Anne is responsible; her beauty serves as incentive for murder. Richard, of course, lies; he kills Edward and Henry so as to come closer to the throne, and he woos Anne for the same reason. By the end of the scene, however, this hunchbacked Machiavellian is able to acknowledge his role in the murders of Edward and Henry, to offer Anne his sword to use against him, and to smile in the knowledge of his victory as she refuses to take vengeance.

Nay, do not pause, for I did ki!1 King
Henry, But 'twas thy beauty that provoked me.
Nay, now dispatch; 'twas I that stabbed
young Edward,
But 'twas thy heavenly face that set me on.
Take up the sword again, or take up me.
(I.ii.179-83)

By focusing on her beauty, Richard insists that Anne fit the very flat definition of "womankind" he articulated in his opening soliloquy-a definition that divides the world into male and female provinces, denying the latter any possibility of communion with emblems (such as swords) of the former. Focusing upon Anne's guilt, Richard deflects responsibility from himself, and constructs a bond of alliance between Anne and himself, against the House of Lancaster, rendering her powerless.

While the exchange between Richard and Anne may be the most dramatic example of Richard's aptitude with respect to sexual dynamics and the allocation of guilt, it is by no means a final example. Another variation occurs in Act III, scene iv, when Richard determines to weed out the ranks of those in opposition to his coronation. Because Hastings is involved with Mistress Shore, all Richard need do is accuse Shore, implicate Hastings (guilt by association) and be rid of him. Thus, in the midst of an assembly meeting, Richard draws forth his withered arm and announces: "And this is Edward's wife, that monstrous witch, / Consorted with that harlot strumpet Shore, / That by their witchcraft thus have marked me" (III.iv.69-71). Hastings's reply, "If they have done this deed, my noble lord" (72), is twisted by an enraged Richard into unimpeachable evidence of guilt:

"If! Thou protector of this damned strumpet, / Talk'st thou to me of ifs? Thou art a traitor. / Off with his head!" (73-75). In spite of the incredible and illogical nature of Richard's accusation (his arm has always been withered; the association of Elizabeth and Mistress Shore as conspirators is extremely unlikely), it holds: Hastings loses his head on the basis of his involvement with a woman. Although the dynamics in the three examples cited above vary considerably, in each instance Richard blames women in order to benefit himself and, in so doing, he creates or destroys associational bonds between men.

If, in the scenes above, Richard is able to manipulate women and blame so as to cut or spin associational threads, his tailoring skills appear yet more impressive when he sets himself to matchmaking-an activity which appears to encourage the reduction of female status from "person" to "thing exchanged." As Levi-Strauss observes in *Structural Anthropology,* marriage functions as the lowest common denominator of society; based as it has been on the exchange of a woman between two men, marriage brings together two formerly independent groups of men into a kinship system. Richard takes advantage of these associational possibilities, but, interestingly enough, the impulse behind his marital connections most often appears to be one of destruction rather than creation; society is wrenched apart rather than drawn together. We see Richard play the role of suitor twice, with Lady Anne and with Queen Elizabeth (whom he approaches to

request the hand of her daughter Elizabeth). To be sure, in formulating his marital plans, Richard approaches women-an eligible widow and a widowed mother-but in both cases, Richard actually focuses on men behind the women. Before meeting Anne en route to Chertsey, he reveals his designs on her:

For then I'll marry Warwick's youngest
daughter.
What though I killed her husband and her
father? The readiest way to make the wench amends
Is to become her husband and her father.
(I.i.153-56)

"To make the wench amends"? Such, of course, is not the actual motivation behind Richard's system of substitution; he realizes that in order to substantiate his claims to the position previously held by Henry VI, it is politic to align himself with Henry's daughter-in-law. Further, maneuvering himself into Anne's bedchamber, Richard moves closer to replacing Edward, former occupant thereof, and former heir to the throne. Thus, after killing Anne's "husband and father," Richard can assume their sexual and political roles. Finally, Richard's speech clarifies the function of women in the marital game: whether the game be one of exchange or one of substitution, the female serves as a piece to be moved by *others,* and a piece having value only in *relation* to others.

Political values, however, like those of the stock market, fluctuate wildly, and by Act IV, Richard (now king) recognizes that Anne has outlived her usefulness to him. After instructing Catesby to rumor it abroad that Anne is "very grievous sick," Richard ruminates alone: "I must be married to my brother's daughter, / Or else my kingdom stands on brittle glass. / Murder her brothers and then marry her!"

(IV.ii.58-60). As in his earlier choice of bride, Richard here pursues a woman from whom he has taken all male relatives; although not fully responsible for the death of Elizabeth's father, Richard conspires to lessen the natural term of Edward's life, and he employs more direct measures with respect to Clarence (Elizabeth's uncle) and the two princes (Elizabeth's brothers). However, not all possible rivals have been obliterated: Richmond also seeks the hand of Edward's daughter, and Richard's awareness of a living male rival sharpens his desire to legitimize his claim:

Now, for I know the Britain Richmond aims
At young Elizabeth, my brother's daughter,
And by that knot looks proudly on the crown,
To her go I, a jolly triving wooer.
(IV iii 40-43)

Elizabeth, of course, has been a loose end; with the young princes dead ("cut off") she remains the only legitimate possibility of access to the throne. By tying his own knots, Richard plans to exclude Richmond from making any claims to the kingdom. In sum, Richard woos both Anne and Elizabeth because of the position they occupy with respect to men. However, in proposing marriage (which might lead to a bonding of male to male

through female), Richard does not seek a union *with* other men but rather *replaces* them by assuming their roles with respect to women.

In considerations of the way Richard employs women as scapegoats and currency, younger female figures have received most attention. However, when we consider how Richard uses women as ciphers, three older women-Queen Elizabeth, Margaret, and the Duchess of York-step, reluctantly, into the foreground. All of these women suffer, on one level, a loss of definition at the hand of Richard. Caught in a society that conceives of women strictly in relational terms (that is, as wives to husbands, mothers to children, queens to kings), the women are subject to loss of title, position, and identity, as Richard destroys those by whom women are defined: husbands, children, kings. Early in the play, Queen Elizabeth perceives the precarious nature of her position as her husband, King Edward, grows weaker and weaker. "The loss of such a lord includes all harms" (I.iii.8), she tells her son Grey. Elizabeth's words find verification not only in later scenes, but also, here, before Edward's death, in the figure of Margaret, England's former queen. Margaret, hiding in the wrings, listens as Richard taunts Elizabeth and accuses her of promoting her favorites. When Elizabeth replies, "Small joy have I in being England's Queen" (109), Margaret can barely restrain herself; she says in an aside: "As little joy enjoys the queen thereof; / For I am she, and a together Joyless" (154-55). Margaret's aside pinpoints the confusion that results when women must depend upon men for identity and when Richard persists in removing these men. Is a woman to be considered "queen" after her "king" has been killed? Does one's title apply only as long as one's husband is alive? And, after her husband's death, what does the "queen" become? Margaret serves, of course, as model for the women of *Richard III;* she enters in Act I and shows Elizabeth and the Duchess of York what they have to expect from the future; like her, they are destined to years of sterile widowhood. But the women of York do not yet perceive Margaret's function; with Richard, they mock her and force her from the stage. Before leaving, however, Margaret further clarifies her relationship to Elizabeth by underlining the similarity of their woes:

Thyself a queen, for me that was a queen,
Outlive thy glory like my wretched self!
Long mayst thou live to wail thy children's
death;
Long die thy happy days before thy death,
And, after many length'ned hours of grief,
Die neither mother, wife, nor England's
Queen!
(I.iii.201-3, 206-8)

Alive-but neither mother, wife, nor England's queen: the description may apply to Margaret, Elizabeth, and the Duchess. Only a very short time elapses between the day of Margaret's curse and the day Elizabeth suffers the death of her lord. Addressing the Duchess, the twice-widowed woman cries: "Edward, my lord, thy son, 'Our king, is dead! / Why grow the branches when the root is gone? / Why wither not the leaves that want their sap?" (II.ii.40-42). Elizabeth's questions forecast her upcoming tragedy.

Not only does Richard subvert the role of queen, he also undermines roles of mother and wife. For example, while the death of Edward robs Elizabeth of a husband, it robs the Duchess of York of a son. Having lost son Clarence earlier, the Duchess's "stock" suffers a depletion of two-thirds. She turns to Elizabeth, commenting that years ago she lost a worthy husband,

And lived with looking on his images;
But now two mirrors of his princely semblance
Are cracked in pieces by malignant death,
And I for comfort have but one false glass
That grieves me when I see my shame in him.
Thou art a widow, yet thou art a mother
And hast the comfort of thy children left.
(II.ii.50-56)

Stressing Elizabeth's yet-current claim to motherhood, the Duchess appears to abjure her own; it is as if she no longer wants to assume the title of mother if Richard is the son who grants her this right; accepting "motherhood" means accepting responsibility for "all these griefs," for the losses sustained by Elizabeth and by Clarence's children.

It is not enough for one mother to abandon her claim to the title of mother; Richard pursues a course of action that eventually forces Elizabeth to relinquish her claim also (note that as the play proceeds, Elizabeth comes to bear a closer resemblance to Margaret). The process leading to Elizabeth's forfeiture of her title is more complicated than that of the Duchess and is accomplished in a series of steps: Buckingham and Richard override maternal authority and, parenthetically, the right of sanctuary, by "plucking" the Duke of York from the sheltering arms of his mother; Brakenbury, under order from Richard, denies Elizabeth entrance to the Tower, thereby denying her right to see her children; Richard casts doubt on the legitimacy of Edward's marriage to Elizabeth, and hence, on the legitimacy of her children; Richard preys upon Elizabeth to grant him her daughter in marriage while Elizabeth knows that to do so would be to sentence her daughter to a living death.

As this process is set in motion, the "Protector" refuses to grant Elizabeth her status as mother; as it comes to a close, Elizabeth freely abjures her motherhood in an attempt to protect her remaining child. Up until the murder of her sons, Elizabeth insists, often futilely, upon her maternal rights. When, for example, Brakenbury refuses to admit her to the Tower, she protests violently upon the grounds of familial relation: "Hath he set bounds between their love and me? / I am their mother; who shall bar me from them?" (IV.i.20-21). Almost as if she were determined actively to dispute Richard's allegations that her children are illegitimate, Elizabeth reiterates, time and time again, the status of her relationship and that of her children to Edward. After the deaths of young Edward and Richard, however, Elizabeth is forced to perform an about-face. Because of Richard's manipulations, a "mother's name is ominous to children"; hence, she must deny her title of mother in order to express her genuine identity as a mother concerned for her children's welfare. She dispatches her son Dorset to France-"O Dorset, speak

not to me, get thee gone!" (IV.i.38)-and expresses her willingness to deny the legitimacy of young Elizabeth's birth to save her from marriage to Richard.

And must she die for this? O, let her live,
And I'll corrupt her manners, stain her
beauty,
Slander myself as false to Edward's bed,
Throw over her the veil of infamy;
So she may live unscarred of bleeding
slaughter,
I will confess she was not Edward's daughter.
(IV.iv.206-11)

It is the love of a mother for her daughter which prompts Elizabeth's offer; she willingly renounces her titles both of wife and legitimate mother.

In the examples cited above, Richard's general course of action is such to encourage women to abandon traditional titles, to de-identify themselves. Richard more specifically encourages this cipherization by confounding the integrity of titular markers: that is, by juggling titles without regard for the human beings behind these titles (although Richard does not restrict himself to female markers, females suffer more grievously from these verbal acrobatics than do males, who may draw upon a wider range of options with respect to identifying roles). Richard's changing choice of title for his sister-in-law Elizabeth most clearly exemplifies his policy of confoundment. Richard's first reference to Elizabeth occurs in a conversation with Clarence, in which Richard promises that he will employ any means to procure his brother's freedom: "And whatsoe'er you will employ me in, / Were it to call King Edward's widow sister, / I will perform it to enfranchise you" (I.i.l08-10). Several things are happening here. First, as the wife of Edward, Richard's brother, Elizabeth is Richard's sister (sister-in-law); she need not solicit the title from Richard, although Richard certainly implies that it is his prerogative to grant or withhold the title at will. Second, the tide Richard actually bestows on Elizabeth is "King Edward's widow," an equivocation of marvelous subtlety; Elizabeth *is* the widow of Grey but Richard's phrasing makes it possible to read this description as a prediction: Elizabeth will wear weeds again. And finally, when Richard and Elizabeth meet in the following scene, it is Elizabeth who twice addresses Richard as "Brother Gloucester"; Richard refuses to call her anything, because, at this time, he has nothing to gain by doing so. Later, in Act II, following the convenient demise of Edward IV, Richard, as if to ensure a smooth transference of power, attempts to placate Elizabeth: he calls her "sister." In Act IV, however, after Richard has approached Elizabeth for the hand of young Elizabeth, he calls her "mother": "Therefore, dear mother-I must call you so-/ Be the attorney of my love to her" (IV.iv.41213). The exchange between Richard and Elizabeth also supplies a rather startling example of Richard's indifference to the human beings who actually give substance to the titles he juggles with such apparent ease. Richard insists that he will provide substitutes for the children Elizabeth has lost at his hand:

To quicken your increase I will beget
Mine issue of your blood upon your daughter.
A grandam's name is little less in love
Than is the doting title of a mother.
(IV.iv.297-300)

Focusing exclusively upon a "grandam's name" and the "title of a mother," Richard attempts to obscure the very real difference between these two positions; he attempts to confound all meaning attached to female position markers-a policy in keeping with his determination to confound women altogether.

Given Richard's perception of woman as enemy, as "Other," we should not be surprised that the action of the play depends upon a systematic denial of the human identity of women. Richard's apparently successful attempts to obscure Elizabeth's titular "sense of self" and Elizabeth's rejection of both her own identity and that of her daughter exemplify, on one level, the progression of women in *Richard III:* from mother to non-mother, wife to widow, queen to crone. However, this "progression" does not take into account a less obvious and more positive progression of women from a condition of bickering rivalry to a condition of sympathetic camaraderie. In the midst of loss, the women turn to each other. Thus, an interesting, but generally ignored, countermotion of interaction *among* women is introduced; having been reduced to the condition of nothing, Margaret, Elizabeth, and the Duchess evidence a new humanity, a humanity apparent nowhere else in the play. We need only explore the progression in the four scenes in *Richard III* in which women confront each other (I.iii; II.ii; IV.i; IV.iv) to see this countermotion. Act I, scene iii, opens with Elizabeth and Richard at each other's throat; with the entrance of Margaret, however, Richard is able to direct all hostility toward her. Even Elizabeth joins with crook-backed Gloucester in condemning the widow of Lancaster; angry words fly across the stage. When Elizabeth applauds Richard for turning Margaret's curse back on herself, Margaret chides the "poor-painted queen":

Why strew'st thou sugar on that bottled
spider
Whose deadly web ensnareth thee about?
Fool, fool, thou whet'st a knife to kill
thyself.
The day will come that thou shalt wish for
me
To help thee curse this poisonous bunch
backed toad.
(I.iii.241-45)

Margaret's prediction proves true, but the women must suffer first.

If the preceding scene depicts the hostility between women of different Houses, Act II, scene ii, depicts hostility between women of the same House. Instead of coming together in sympathy upon learning of the deaths of Clarence and Edward, the women of York and the children of Clarence engage in a chorus of moans, each claiming the

greater loss. An appalling absence of empathy characterizes this meeting. A few lines may serve to indicate the mood of the entire scene:

DUCH. O, what cause have I,
Thine being but a moi'ty of my moan,
To overgo thy woes and drown thy cries!
BOY. Ah, aunt, you wept not for our father's death.
How can we aId you with our kindred tears?
DAUGHTER. Our fatherless distress was left unmoaned;
Your widow-dolor likewise be unwept!
ELIZABETH. Give me no help in lamentation;
I am not barren to bring forth complaints.
(II.ii.59-67)

Obviously, the tendency here is away from commiseration and toward a selfish indulgence. It is not until Act IV, scene i, that a reversal of this tendency begins to make itself felt, the result of the women's sympathy as their position continues to erode. Elizabeth, the Duchess of York, Anne, and Clarence's daughter meet en route to the Tower to greet the young princes. When Elizabeth is denied visitation privileges, the Duchess and Anne support her maternal rights. Even when Stanley announces that Anne is to be crowned queen, the bond of sympathy between Anne and Elizabeth is not destroyed. Given her history of suffering, Elizabeth can respond now with feeling to Anne as Margaret could not when she was replaced by Elizabeth. When the new queen expresses her wish that the "inclusive verge of golden metal" were "red-hot steel to sear me to the brains," Elizabeth attempts to console her: "Go, go, poor soul! I envy not thy glory. / To feed my humor wish thyself no harm" (IV.i.63-64). The Duchess of York adds her blessing also: "Go thou to Richard, and good angels tend thee!" (92). How different from the feeling of Act II, scene ii! Even though this Union of sympathy may not generate any practical power (Richard continues to confound the women) it does prompt a revision in our responses to them: they attain a tragic dignity.

The most moving example of women-aiding-women, however, occurs in Act IV, scene iv, where the women of York join Margaret of Lancaster in cursing Richard. This union is achieved only gradually. Old Queen Margaret enters alone and withdraws to eavesdrop on Elizabeth and the Duchess of York, who sit down together to lament the death of the princes and lament their uselessness: "Ah that thou wouldst as soon afford a grave / As thou canst yield a melancholy seat" (IV.iv.31-32). When Margaret comes forward and joins the two women on the ground, she first claims that her griefs "frown on the upper hand" and it seems the scene will be a reiteration of the earlier contest.

If sorrow can admit society,
Tell o'er your woes again by viewing mine. I had an Edward, till a Richard killed him; I had a husband, till a Richard killed him. Thou hadst an Edward, till a Richard killed him;
Thou hadst a Richard, till a Richard killed
him.
(IV.iv.38-43)

The Duchess, catching the rhythm of Margaret's refrain, interrupts in order to wail a few lines of her own. Margaret, however, regains voice, reminding the Duchess that it is her womb that has bred the cause of all their sorrows: "From forth the kennel of thy womb hath crept / A hellhound that doth hunt us all to death" (IV.iv.47-48). These words signal a reversal in the dynamics of the scene; no longer willing to recognize the legal ties to men which prohibit a communion between women of different parties, these women join together in sorrow, in suffering; it is easy enough to imagine the three of them, seated on the earth, hand in hand. The Duchess abandons her competition with Margaret for the title of most grief-stricken, and turns, in commiseration, to her: "0 Harry's wife, triumph not in my woes! / God witness with me I have wept for thine" (59-60). Elizabeth, too, moves toward Margaret, admitting that the prophesied time has come for her to request Margaret's help in cursing the "foul bunch-backed toad" (81) Richard. Thus, the exchange among the women leads to the decision to arm themselves (to assume a male prerogative) with words; Margaret provides lessons in cursing and the Duchess suggests that they smother Richard in "the breath of bitter words" (133); no more wasted or feeble words-instead, the women now use words as weapons. Accordingly, when Richard enters a short while after Margaret's departure, Elizabeth and the Duchess verbally accost and accuse him. Unaccustomed to such noise, an indignant Richard commands: "Either be patient and entreat me fair, / Or with the clamorous report of war / Thus will I drown your exclamations" (152-54). Richard's response to these insistent female voices is worthy of note as it reiterates the alliance of Richard with war and against women, and as it serves as summary statement of Richard's policy with respect to womenthey must be silenced. The Duchess, however, finds voice, and her final words to Richard take the form of a curse; she turns against her own House, prays for the adverse party, and damns her son Richard to a death of shame. Her ability to do so with such strength is surely a result of the communion of sympathy shared by the three women. If, in previous scenes, a meeting of women merely leads to angry words and altercation, the meeting of Act IV, scene iv, leads to the formation of bonds among the women against a single foe. When the progression of female characters is charted on this level, it becomes apparent that they do not deserve the a priori dismissal they too frequently receive. Although attenuated by Richard, women take on an emotional solidity, a roundness of true humanity.

A consideration of birth metaphor clarifies, yet further, the paradoxically double presentation of women in *Richard III;* specifically, perversion of birth metaphors suggests the negative condition of women [ . . . ] (from mother to non-mother, etc.), while the persistence and importance of these metaphors suggest the very positive condition of women [ . . . ] (as individuals having considerable power and human value). Although examples of the birth metaphor are so numerous as to render selection a problem, three categories may be arbitrarily distinguished: metaphor as descriptive of the condition of the times; as descriptive of Richard's activities and of Richard himself from the perspective of other characters; and as descriptive of Richard's mind as revealed in his own comments.

As mentioned previously, Richard "declares war" on the present time in his opening soliloquy; the extent to which he realizes this declaration may be felt in comments made by other characters throughout the play about the changed condition of the times-

comments which most often work through a distortion of imagery usually associated with birth. When a group of citizens gathers to discuss the recent death of Edward and the probable confusion that will result, one compares his apprehension of ensuing danger to the swelling of water before a boisterous storm (II.iii.42-45). Although "swelling" is not, by any means, a term associated exclusively with pregnancy, it almost always conveys a feeling of pregnant expectation. Here, and at all other times throughout *Richard III,* that which is expected, that which swells the body, is something ominous, something negative. This consistently pejorative use of the term "swelling" stands in contrast to a possible positive application of the word: that is, swelling as indicative of a generous fertility. A similarly pejorative application of usually positive terms occurs in the speech of Elizabeth when she, like the citizens, is informed of Edward's death. Refusing all offers of sympathy from others, she cries: "I am not barren to bring forth complaints. / All springs reduce their currents to mine eyes, / That I . . . / May send forth plenteous tears to drown the world" (II.ii.67-68, 70). Two aspects of Elizabeth's choice of metaphor are worthy of note. First, the widow asserts her fertility, but a fertility that gives birth to complaints, instead of children. Second, the "children" that Elizabeth does produce assume the shape of tears, tears which, under normal conditions, might function as springs of life. Given the corruption of conditions under Richard, however, Elizabeth sends forth her tears to destroy life, "to drown the world."

Examination of Richard's specific activities reveals more explicitly his perversion of regenerative processes. When the thugs employed to murder Clarence attempt to convince him that Richard is the father of this deed, Clarence shakes his head in disbelief: "It cannot be, for he bewept my fortune / And hugged me in his arms and swore with sobs / That he would labor my delivery" (I.iv.247-49). While Clarence assumes that Richard will "deliver" him from prison, to freedom, Richard intends to deliver Clarence from prison to death. Thus, Richard reverses the normal delivery process; instead of drawing Clarence forth from the womb, two midwives push him back into a yet darker womb (specifically, into a butt of malm sey). The speech of Tyrrel, another murderer employed by Richard, provides a second commentary on Richard's activities. Having commissioned the execution of the young princes, he tells the king: "If to have done the thing you gave in charge / Beget your happiness, be happy then, / For it is done" (IV.iii.25-27). "The thing" given in charge is the murder of two children; once more, begetting and killing are conjoined. The comments of Margaret and the Duchess affirm this unnatural conjunction, transferring it to the literal level; Richard's unnatural birth. Margaret attacks Richard as "Thou slander of thy heavy mother's womb! / Thou loathed issue of thy father's loins!" (I.iii.230-31). Similarly, because of son Richard, the Duchess of York cries out against her own womb, revealing an extreme of female debasement and acceptance of guilt: "O my accursed womb, the bed of death! / A cockatrice hast thou hatched to the world, / Whose unavoided eye is murderous" (IV.i.53-55). Richard, forcing an association of the womb with "the bed of death," succeeds, at least *partially,* in debasing the va!ue of women, these creatures with wombs.

One final category of defective birth imagery is that employed by Richard in describing his own activities. After the general altercation of Act I, scene iii, for example, Richard steps off alone and comments: "I do the wrong, and first begin to brawl. / The secret

mischiefs that I *set abroach* / I lay unto the grievous charge of others" (I.iii.323-25, emphasis added). Or, just a short time later, when Edward, unaware of Richard's expeditious execution of Clarence, informs his court that peace has been made "between these swelling wrong-incensed peers," Richard replies: "A blessed *labor* my most sovereign lord" (II.i.52-53, emphasis added). But undoubtedly the most graphic of the many examples of debasement of the language of birth occurs in Act IV, scene iv, as Richard encourages Elizabeth to allow him to right previous wrongs by marrying her daughter. When Elizabeth protests, "Yet thou didst kill my children," Richard counters: "But in your daughter's womb I'll bury them, / Where in that nest of spicery they will breed / Selves of themselves, to your recomforture" (IV.iv.423-25). Richard will bury old Elizabeth's children in young Elizabeth's womb? Could Richard hit upon a line of argument any more perversely unnatural? Up to this point, most birth metaphors have been constructed so as to suggest that the womb breeds no good (as, for example, that the Duchess's womb breeds a cockatrice); here, Richard forces the metaphor to work in reverse as well: the womb serves as tomb, functioning as both sprouting ground and burial plot. In forcing this perverse alliance of terms, Richard reaffirms, on a linguistic level, the impulse behind all of his activities with respect to women-the impulse to silence, to negate. Yet, paradoxically, the persistence with which Richard acts upon this impulse gives the lie to the possibility of its fulfillment: Richard's *need* to debase birth imagery implies that women (those capable of giving birth) have a power which finally cannot be devalued or eliminated; further, his repeated attempts, on a larger level, to rob women of their identity as mothers, wives, or queens, are doomed to frustration in that he cannot rob women of their identity as creative, regenerative human beings.

*Richard III* opens with a series of complaints directed, implicitly, against women. It is women who tame "Grim-visaged War," who caper to lutes, who play Love's games-and who govern the times. *Richard III* ends with a series of scenes on the battlefield; men engage in combat with men, and women are nowhere to be found (the last female on stage appears in Act IV). On one level, the process of the play is one of denial and deflation; as Richard destroys husbands, kings, and children, as he confounds traditionally stable sources of identity and subjects women to an unnatural association with the forces of death, he suggests that women are without value-or, even worse, that they are destructive of value. But a reading of *Richard III* on just this one level does an injustice to the play; running parallel to the process described above is a counterprocess, one that insists upon the inherently positive value of women. We see evidence of this counterprocess in the progression of women from a condition of rivalry, battling amongst themselves, to a condition of camaraderie, sympathizing with each other, and in the persistence of the attack that Richard feels compelled to wage, both in life and in language, against these powerful foes. Even Richmond's final speech contributes to our sense of the invincibility of these females; after describing the bloody hatred between brothers which has divided England, Richmond proposes a reunification through his conjunction with the young woman Elizabeth. Hence, the argument of *Richard III* moves in two directions. The first insists that women are purely media of exchange and have no value in themselves; the second, overriding the first, insists that even when used as currency, women's value cannot be completely destroyed.

# Critical Essay #13

Source: "The Paradox of Power: The *Henry VI- Richard III* Tetralogy," in *Wooing, Wedding, and Power; Women in Shakespeare's Plays,* Columbia University Press, 1981, Pl'. 155-207.

*[In her examination of the powerlessness of women in* Richard III, *Dash focuses primarily upon Margaret, Anne, and Elizabeth. She describes Margaret as "dynamic," remarking also that she is the least conventional of the three women and the character most often left out of productions of the play. Dash describes Anne, by contrast, as more compliant and more typically "feminine" in her obedience to Richard. Finally, she asserts that Elizabeth, who at first seems somewhat lackluster, grows more complex in Act IV, after Richard has murdered her young sons and she has asked Margaret to teach her how to curse her enemies. At this point, Dash compares the two Wooing scenes, observing that where Anne falls victim to Richard's clever words, the more experienced Elizabeth turns the tables on him.]*

In *Richard Ill,* four widows walk the stage: Margaret, Elizabeth, the Duchess of York, and Anne. If women are confused by the meaning of power when they are young, being wooed or acting as wives to men of power, they realistically discover its meaning when they become widows. They learn that their husbands were not only the source of their power, but worse still, of their identity. How does a woman cope with this discovery, this becoming a non-person? Shakespeare offers four versions in *Richard Ill,* from the simple acceptance of her status by the Duchess of York to the anxious search for new patterns by Elizabeth, who first entered this tetralogy when, as a widow suing for rights to her husband's lands, she discovered her powerlessness for the first time. Saved by her wit and beauty, she then moved from powerlessness to power. Like Margaret earlier, she became a queen and the mother of princes. When, in *Richard III,* the pattern repeats itself, Elizabeth seeks more substantial answers.

Her experience continues to mirror Margaret's despite deviations. Elizabeth's husband, instead of being murdered by Richard, dies, his illness aggravated by Richard's histrionics. Instead of losing one son and heir to the throne, she loses two. Instead of being childless at the end of the play, she remains a mother with surviving children. Instead of being a widow of a defeated monarch, she is widow of a man who was in power. But it little matters. Like Margaret, Elizabeth too loses power, discovering the strength of the patriarchal system. Finally, near the play's close, she seeks alternatives. Shakespeare offers a tentative glimpse at women supporting women, women relying on women, women bonding-even if in bitterness-with women.

To do this, the dramatist alters history and creates one of the most interesting studies in the play-he retains Margaret. Historically, she never returned to England after the deaths of her son and husband. Moreover, she died before the time of the action of this play. According to the chronicles, she roamed the French court, a woman in mourning for the rest of her life:

And where in the beginning of her tyme, she lyved like a Quene, in the middel she ruled like an empresse, toward thende she was vexed with troble, never quyet nor in peace, & in her very extreme age she passed her dayes in Fraunce, more lyke a death then a lyfe, languishyng and mornyng in continuall sorowe, not so much for her selfe and her husbande, whose ages were almost consumed and worne, but for the losse of prince Edward her sonne (whome she and her husband thought to leve, both overlyver of their progeny, and also of their kyngdome) to whome in this lyfe nothing could be either more displeasant or grevous.

Shakespeare not only brings her back to England but gives her an important role in the play. She acts as narrative voice; she is seer and sibyl [a female prophet], predicting the doom of those responsible for the deaths of her son and husband; but she is also a dynamic woman, an anomalous character, roaming the palace of a rival monarch, expressing her opinions in positive language, sneering at York's unattractive progeny who now control power. Having lost all, she fears no one.

Margaret, who weaves in and out of this tetralogy *[Henry VI,* parts 1-3, and *Richard III],* the only woman character whose growth we observe from youth to old age, may also have challenged Shakespeare as a creative artist. Knowing that she walked through the court in France, a person in constant mourning, he might have wanted to project this image on the stage. Would such a woman have learned anything? Would she have grown? How might she have handled life, alone, in a hostile environment? Finally, has she made any breakthrough in self-knowledge; did she learn anything about herself as a woman?

Before she enters, Shakespeare introduces her principal antagonist, Richard, the title character. He defines the power and powerlessness of women in the first scene of *Richard III.* Introduced in soliloquy, he confides his plans to reach the throne despite the mass of relatives standing between him and his objective. "I am determined to prove a villain" (I.i.30), he proclaims, baring his plot to frame his brother Clarence. When the latter enters, en route to prison, Richard immediately blames a woman for Clarence's present fate. "Why, this it is, when men are rul'd by women" (62), Richard asserts, implying Queen Elizabeth's evil influence on Edward. Misogyny runs wild, for Clarence easily agrees, adding Mistress Shore's name to those who "rule" the King. Before the scene closes, a third woman is mentioned. Richard, again in soliloquy, admits,

. . I'll marry Warwick's youngest daughter.
What though I kill'd her husband and her
father?
The readiest way to make the wench amends
Is to become her husband and her father.
(I.i.1S3-S6)

Moments later Anne, the play's third widow, walks on following the coffin of King Henry, her father-in-law, and taking it to burial. Asking the pall bearers to "set down" their "honorable load" (I.ii.i), Anne delivers a long set speech of mourning explicitly cursing the murderer, Richard. She then orders the pallbearers to resume the trek to the place

of burial. Richard, unobserved, interferes, countermanding her order. "Stay, you that bear the corse, and set it down" (33). At their attempt to continue, Richard threatens with his sword. They obey. Graphically, this scene illustrates Richard's power and Anne's powerlessness. Helpless to challenge him physically, she attempts to disarm him with words. She seeks to force her will. Scorn, hatred, vehemence, curses: all fall from her lips. Little anticipating the aim of his confrontation, she is astonished and completely bewildered when Richard offers marriage.

Historically, Richard pursued Anne for two years before winning her. Shakespeare compresses this into one scene, choosing a moment when she is most confused and emotionally most unstable. In a long protracted courtship, their debates-her responses to his persistent claims-would have to be developed so that the many variables in personality could influence the decision. When compressed into a single scene, his duplicity and her confusion must be apparent at once. Some Critics believe that the scene offers an opportunity to prove Richard's extraordinary ability. More recently critics have become aware of the psychological vulnerability of a person at a time of emotional crisis such as the loss of a husband and a father-in-law.

First Richard tries flattery, but Anne resists, assuring him that she would scratch her beauty with her nails (I.ii.126) if she thought It were the cause of the death of her husband or father-in-law. Then Richard, the consummate actor, offers her his sword and "lays his breast open" for her to kill him. He challenges her in a style that she cannot fathom. Untrained in the use of the sword, unwilling to take a human life, Anne reacts as a normal human being might, especially someone who has not been initiated into the games of war and murder. Although Richard continues "Nay, do not pause: for I did kill King Henry-/ But 'twas thy beauty that provoked me" (179-80), she drops the sword. But Richard's words are really superfluous. All of her training as a woman assures him success. Men are trained to kill. Women are not. Here, against a defenseless person, in a time of uncertain peace, to kill the brother of the King would be insanity as well as suicide.

Richard then poses a false dichotomy for her: "Take up the sword again, or take up me" (I.ii.183). He leaves her no option; she must either kill him or accept him as her husband. Caught between suspicion and her training as a woman, Anne can do no more than say, "Arise, dissembler! Though I wish thy death, / I will not be thy executioner" (184-85). Still she does not acquiesce to marriage. The key interchange between them occurs moments later when Richard offers "Then bid me kill myself" (186) but refuses to accept her words, "I have already" (187). Instead, he then questions the honesty of her original intention. "That was in thy rage. / Speak it again" (187-88) he challenges, promising to kill himself for love. Anne's agonize words, "I would I knew thy heart" (192) are spoken by many of the characters throughout the play. No one knows Richard's "heart"-his intention-until it is too late. For a woman being wooed, however, the price is particularly high-not friendship or allegiance, but marriage.

Although Richard congratulates himself on his success-"To take her in her heart's extremest hate, / With curses in her mouth, tears in her eyes" (I.ii.23132)-Shakespeare here creates a situation in which a manipulative liar has the best chance of success, a

moment when his prey is most confused. Richard's timing, audacity, overwhelming flattery, and histrionics with the sword are beyond Anne's ability to cope. She belongs with such characters as Ophelia [from Shakespeare's p!ay *Hamlet],* who is conforming, obedient, docile, "feminine." Historically, having resisted Richard for two years, she may have had more of the strength of Margaret or an Elizabeth. She may also have had as few options as they did, being sought by the persistent brother of the King. But rather than repeat a pattern already twice told, Shakespeare creates another type of woman, caught in a different situation, and reacting on a level not yet dramatized in this tetralogy. The man she must confront is the man who boasted in the previous play:

Why, I can smile, and murther whiles I
smile,
Deceive more slily than Ulysses could,
Change shapes with Proteus for advantages,
Can I do this, and cannot get a crown?
Tut, were it farther off, I'll pluck it down.
(3 *Henry VI,* III.ii.182-95)

Richard applies his abilities, skills, and techniques to convince Anne.

Critics have been harsh in their evaluation of her. August W. Von Schlegel, the nineteenth-century German scholar, writes that "Anne disappears without our learning anything further respecting her: in marrying the murderer of her husband she had shown a weakness almost incredible." William Richardson, in the eighteenth century, concludes that "She is represented by Shakespeare of a mind altogether frivolous; incapable of deep affection; guided by no steady principles of virtue. . . ; the prey of vanity, which is her ruling passion." As Richardson continues, he not only says that Richard understands her perfectly but that she is a character of "no rational or steady virtue, and consequently of no consistency of character." He even suggests that it is "resentment, rather than grief, which she expresses." Georg Gervinus, the nineteenth-century German literary historian, offers a more balanced appraisal, however, when he writes, "We must take into account extraordinary degree of dissimulation, which deceives even experienced men," nothing also how stereotypical a portrait Shakespeare creates in Anne by having her delight in saving "such a penitent."

Anne appears in only one other scene, and that without Richard. Now married, she hopes to visit her nephews-the heirs apparent-held in the tower by her husband. Unlike her historical prototype, she admits:

Lo, ere I can repeat this curse again,
Within so small a time, my woman's heart
Grossly grew captive to his honey words,
And prov'd the subject of mine own soul's
curse.
(IV.I.77-80)

She is self-deprecating, and blames herself for her fate. Her conventionality is perhaps best testified to by the fact that she survives in all versions of the play. In Colley Cibber's version, Richard even tries to tempt her to commit suicide. In a recent production at the Cort Theatre starring Al Pacino, she appears so cold, self-righteous, and vindictive that audiences applaud Richard's success. There, although the text that remains is Shakespeare's, the cuts are reminiscent of Cibber's popular eighteenth-century work.

On the other hand, the one woman who most frequently disappears from productions is the one who challenges Richard, the least conventional woman-Margaret. Cibber set the pattern in 1700 when he eliminated her from his text. Since then, his version with its heavy emphasis on the male "star" role has seldom left the stage. But even when Shakespeare's text is used, Margaret frequently disappears or loses most of her lines. For example, in a Phelps 1845 prompt-book, she no longer functions as an individual, cursing the many members of the court, but acts rather as a choral voice of doom. Very similar cutting appears in a 1964 typescript of the play. She is also absent from Laurence Olivier's film version and from the Pacino 1979 production. Comparing the Cibber version with Shakespeare's play, Arthur Colby Sprague writes that: the more obviously memorable episodes. . . have survived. . .. But Margaret is gone and Clarence and Hastings and Edward: the price paid for compactness was high. It is a version. . . which does best when it keeps to surfaces and shallows; an opportunist version, cunning, prosaic and vulgar.

Many productions of *Richard III,* like Olivier's and Pacino's mentioned above, follow Shakespeare's text but also take their cues for cutting from Cibber. It is perhaps difficult for audiences to realize how deeply eighteenth-century changes-perhaps because they reflect attitudes toward women that still exist-continue to intrude on, shape, and gently distort the text.

Margaret's absence necessarily affects the total impact of the play; her entrance, *in* Act I, scene *iii,* offers a welcome antidote to Richard's swaggering triumph with Anne. Listening to Queen Elizabeth and Richard arguing, Margaret, once again, as she did so long ago in 1 *Henry VI* speaks *in* asides. This time, however, her asides are not the questions of a young virgin but the bitter comments of an old woman. She listens to the conversation of those in power. To Elizabeth's "Small joy have I in being England's Queen" (109), Margaret mutters to herself:

And less'ned by that small, God I beseech him!
Thy honor, state, and seat is due to me.
(I.iii.11 0-11)

At once we are reminded that Margaret is a deposed queen. We wonder at her presence in this court. Commenting on Richard's words, but still speaking in aside, she exclaims:

Hie thee to hell for shame, and leave this
world,

Thou cacodemon, there thy kingdom is.
(142-43)

Only the audience hears her; nevertheless, her lines establish her strange position. What is she doing at the court, this woman, so unafraid of Richard who, in asides, tells us of the murder of Henry in the tower and the kil1ing of her son Edward? When she speaks aloud, Margaret pierces the false veneer of Richard, but also reveals antagonism for the woman who has made her a shadow, a nonbeing, the woman who is Queen. Although Richard reminds Margaret that she is "banished on pain of death" (166), she dismisses the threat, challenging him to enforce it. "I do find more pain in banishment / Than death can yield me here by my abode" (167-68). He then pursues another direction. Always aware of his audience, the people around him on the stage, he attacks Margaret for the murders of York and Rutland. As a result the squabbling members of the court unite against her. Aware of Richard's technique, she taunts:

What? were you snarling all before I came,
And turn you all your hatred now on me)
(187-89)

She then curses each of them. Still wrestling with the patriarchal values she has absorbed, she first curses the Queen, her alter ego in this strange arrangement where kings are murdered to make way for kings but queens in number are permitted to survive. Listing the parallels between them, Margaret wishes the other woman a fate like her own:

Though not by war, by surfeit die your king,
As ours by murther, to make him a king!
Edward thy son, that now is Prince of
Wales,
For Edward our son, that was Prince of
Wales,
Die in his youth by like untimely violence!
(I.iii.196-200)

She keeps returning to her role of mother.

Long mayst thou live to wail thy children's
death,
And see another, as I see thee now,
Deck'd in thy rights as thou art stall'd in
mine!
(203-5)

Finally, she condemns Elizabeth to a fate too familiar to women.

Long die thy happy days before thy death,
And after many length'ned hours of grief,
Die neither mother, wife, nor England's

queen!
(206-8)

In this long passage, Margaret details her own life as queen. Unlike the curses one might choose for a man, those chosen for Elizabeth have a different emphasis-not death but life continued after joy has passed.

When the bitter woman fails to stop her cursing, Richard interrupts. In verbal battle, she responds, wishing him a fate more heinous than the others. Her curse concludes with "Thou detested-." Never one to refuse a challenge, Richard quickly interjects the word "Margaret." But she is not to be deflected from her purpose. Her sentence continues, ending with "Richard!" Elizabeth, although she bears no love for Richard, is still a victim of that minority status psychology that mandates she express her deepest contempt for another woman. "Thus have you breath'd your curse against yourself" (239), she mocks. Her words are hardly worth including in this exchange except to remind us of the difference between the two women-the sibyl-like, intense, passionate Margaret, and the more pedestrian, rational Elizabeth.

Finally, Cassandra-like, Margaret warns the one person exempt from her vengeance to beware of Richard:

Have not to do with him, beware of him;
Sin, death, and hell have set their marks on
him,
And all their ministers attend on him.
(I. iii. 291-93)

But Buckingham rejects her warning. Nevertheless, he shudders at her curses. Ironically, she is attacked as being a witch and a lunatic although her listeners recognize the core of truth in her words. During this scene Dorset, the new young lord who is Elizabeth's son, warns "Dispute not with her, she is lunatic" (253).

Buckingham expresses the impact of the curses for all of them, "My hair doth stand on end to hear her curses" (303).

When her curses come true, she believes her mission is completed. But Shakespeare suggests that one possibility lies ahead-women extending their hands to each other in support-creating bonds with each other, rather than living in separate isolated worlds, connected only with the men whom they have wed. Entering in Act IV, scene iv, Margaret, in soliloquy, mutters

"So now prosperity begins to mellow" (IV. iv. 1). Still bitter, overflowing with anger and hatred, she plans to go to France, hoping the lives of those who robbed her of son and husband will prove "bitter, black, and tragical" (7). She is a figure from the revenge tragedy of the period, asking right for right and Plantagenet for Plantagenet. It is only after the Duchess of York exclaims

0 Harry's wife, triumph not in my woes! God witness with me, I have wept for thine

(IV. iv. 59-60)

That Margaret explains herself to them: "I am hungry for revenge" (61). She prays for Richard's end. Aware of her anomic position, Margaret returns to the theme of displacedness-"Thou didst usurp my place" -and to the role of childlessness and widowhood. She cannot establish a bond with any woman-not lend support, or seek help, or accept friendship.

"Vain flourish of my fortune" (IV. iv. 82), she had called Elizabeth. Detailing its meaning, the displaced Queen recognizes the role she played, "One heav'd ahigh, to be hurl'd down below" (86). She knows now that she was merely

The flattering index of a direful pageant;
. . . a bubble;
A queen in jest, only to fill the scene.
(85-91)

She then enumerates the functions of a queen, listing the bending peers and thronging troops that followed her and Elizabeth when each was Queen. This speech, by the dramatist who later was to list the many roles of man as he progressed from infancy to old age, vibrates with the emptiness of a woman's roles. "Vain flourish of my fortune," Margaret had repeated. It is a line that many older women might speak, watching young women seeking success in the world and misreading their husbands' glories for their own.

Although Margaret's words are full of venom, hatred, and disappointment, Elizabeth seeks to create some bond, some tenuous connection, with this other woman. The scene marks a shift in attitude and is the first in which these women finally speak to each other as equals. Frequently referred to as the scene of the wailing women, it is also the beginning of mutual supportiveness. "My words are dull, 0, quicken them with thine!" (124), Elizabeth begs, asking Margaret for instruction in cursing.

Think that thy babes were sweeter than they
were,
And he that slew them fouler than he is.
(IV. iv. 120-21)

The older woman offers a basic premise that provides strength for Elizabeth's next encounter.

Clues to a sometimes ambiguous exchange between characters frequently appear in the sequential arrangement of Shakespeare's scenes. Moments after Margaret's advice to Elizabeth, Richard enters and asks for Elizabeth's daughter's hand in marriage. Uncle Richard, murderer of the young woman's brothers, now King, anticipates success. In the debate between them, Elizabeth has her first opportunity to apply her newly learned lesson. Questions rather than answers characterize most of her replies. "Shall I be tempted of the devil thus?" (418), she asks. "Ay, if the devil tempt you to do good" (419), Richard sanctimoniously replies. "Shall I forget myself to be myself" (420), she

continues. "Ay, if yourself's remembrance wrong yourself" (421), he answers. When she seems to equivocate, Richard simply carries on as best he can, picking up what he thinks are hints of affirmation. Even Elizabeth's "Yet thou didst kill my children" (422) fails to daunt him. He offers what he considers a perfectly logical response:

But in your daughter's womb I bury them;
Where in that nest of spicery they will breed
Selves of themselves, to your recomforture.
(IV. iv. 423-25)

This speech, so ugly in its lasciviousness, reflecting the character of the man who is speaking, must be answered without disgust by a mother. Again Elizabeth resorts to a question, rather than an answer. "Shall I go win my daughter to thy will?" (426). Has she finally fooled Richard? Immediately after her departure, he gloats, "Relenting fool, and shallow, changing woman" (431).

She should not fool us. We have heard her scene with Margaret. We have listened to her first words to Richard in this encounter-"For my daughters, Richard, / They shall be praying nuns, not weeping queens" (201-2)-and we have seen her pity for Anne. The choice of a convent for her grows not from religious conviction-we have not heard any deep expressions of religious faith from Elizabeth-but from the wish to give her daughters control over their own bodies. Elizabeth has expressed herself on this subject from the time of her first appearance in 3 *Henry VI.*

When one compares Anne's response to Richard with Elizabeth's series of rhetorical questions topped by the instruction: "Write to me very shortly, / And you shall understand from me her mind" (428-29), one realizes Shakespeare's artistry. Richard, thinking that he is repeating an earlier wooing scene, assumes a repetition of that success-this time with far less effort than in his encounter with Anne. Because of his misogyny, he fails to hear the nuances that separate the responses of the women. He forgets the differences between them: one a young, unworldly heiress, the other a mature woman who has lived a varied existence. Finally, he has figured without understanding the impact of the death of one's child on a parent. The superb manipulator of people, Richard fails to read a woman accurately, because he fails to understand her feelings toward herself and her children.

To an extent, then, Elizabeth has triumphed. She has begun to understand the meaning of power and the necessity for choosing one's language with care, for restraining one's words, refraining from cursing. She has learned that she must function alone, leading, not leaning. In this her first test after her encounter with Margaret and her awareness of the role of queen as shadow, she has begun to understand the limits of power for a woman. She succeeds in fooling Richard, but had he not lost his life in battle, she probably would have been powerless against him. Her daughter, instead of becoming a nun, marries Richard's victorious adversary: Richmond, later Henry VII. Thus, she too becomes a queen, wearing the borrowed robes of power.

The women in these plays, queens and duchesses, wives of men of political strength, seek to exert power but discover its elusiveness. Margaret Fuller writes: "A profound thinker has said 'No married woman can represent the female world, for she belongs to her husband. The idea of Woman must be represented by a virgin.'" Perhaps the Queen in Shakespeare's audience believed this. The women in these plays, however, demonstrate the powerlessness of women whether virgins, wives, or widows. Fuller herself countered the argument by blaming marriage and "the present relation between the sexes, that the woman *does* belong to the man, instead of forming a whole with him."

This chapter opened with references to power and to women's powerlessness in a society where sexual politics is so pervasive that women have internalized the message. Shakespeare illustrates this by revealing the minority psychology of the women. They scorn other women, attempt to imitate men, and tend to believe in their own inferiority. The men too believe the women inferior to them, whether the women are self-confident and challenge male power, or whether they acquiesce, seeking to appease male anger. The stereotypes do not exist solely among the characters in the plays, but appear also in the world outside the plays-in the criticism and productions. We read of Margaret's unwomanly strength, and of Richard's womanly guile. A recent critic describes the character's histrionic talents and sensitivity to people and atmosphere: "His awareness of other people has, in the best Hitlerian manner, an almost *feminine* subtlety. The list of roles he assumes is endless" (italics mine). On the basis of evidence within the plays, one might have expected a different conclusion. For- as well as Richard-York, Edward, Buckingham, and Warwick have been the supreme manipulators, men of guile, organizing behind the scenes and plotting insurrection. Misogyny persists.

Optimistically, Fuller recommends that women not be influenced by men because they fail to see the entire picture. She instructs women to look within themselves to find their own "peculiar secret." This means rejecting the stereotypes and accepting their own strengths. Margaret, struggling with the concept that strength is "masculine," is vu! nerable to the attack of "unwomanliness." Elizabeth, perhaps discovering her own "peculiar secret," tries to establish a bond of friendship or support with the woman she had scorned. But learning to curse is hardly a start on the path to understanding that the stereotypes (for "maleness" strength, courage, and initiative; and for "femaleness" docility, passivity, and weakness) must be denied if women are to gain power, not over the lives of others, but over their own lives. Shakespeare dramatizes the reality that women cannot do this alone. These plays reveal the limited world that exists as long as people believe that power belongs to men and powerlessness to women, refusing to recognize "the benefits. . . the world would gain by ceasing to make sex a disqualification for privileges and a badge of subjection."

# Adaptations

*Richard III.* London Film Productions, Ltd., 1955.

Critically acclaimed motion picture version of the history play, featuring Laurence Olivier, John Gielgud, Ralph Richardson, and Claire Bloom. The film was produced and directed by Laurence Olivier. Distributed on video by Embassy Home Entertainment, 1985. 138 minutes.

*Richard III.* International Film Bureau, 1974.

Covers two scenes from the play-Richard's "winter of our discontent" soliloquy and his wooing of Lady Anne. Distributed by International Film Bureau, Inc. 12 minutes.

*Richard III.* BBC, Time-Life Television, 1982. Televised performance of the history play, part of the "Shakespeare Plays" series Distributed by Time-Life Video. 228 minutes.

*Richard III.* MGM/UA, 1996.

Motion picture set in an imaginary England dUring the 1930s, capturing the political atmosphere-one of instability and tyranny-of the time period. Ian McKellen, who wrote the screenplay, plays Richard III. The film also stars Annette Bening as Queen Elizabeth, Jim Broadbent as Buckingham, Robert Downey, Jr. as Rivers, Nigel Hawthorne as Clarence, Kristin Scott Thomas as Richard's wife, Anne, and Maggie Smith as the Duchess of York. Directed by Richard Loncraine. Distributed by MGM/UA Home Video. 100 minutes.

# Further Study

## History

Richards, Jeffrey. "The Riddle of Richard Ill." *History*

*Today* 33, No.8 (August 1983): 18-25.

Attempts to distinguish fact from fiction regarding the reign of Richard III. Richards concludes that King Richard III "was an efficient but unlucky and ultimately unhappy ruler."

Literary Commentary

Berman, Ronald. "Anarchy and Order in 'Richard Ill' and 'King John.'" *Shakespeare Survey* 20, edited by Kenneth Muir, pp. 51-9. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967.

Contends that *Richard III* and *King John* differ from Shakespeare's other history plays in the" cynical and realistic wit" of some of their major characters. Berman sees both plays as a struggle between individual pragmatism and historic order.

Brooks, Harold F. "'Richard III,' Unhistorical Amplifications: The Women's Scenes and Seneca." *Modern Language Review* 75, Pt. 4 (October 1980): 721-37.

Suggests that when Shakespeare wrote the scenes for the wooing of Anne and the mourning of Margaret, Elizabeth, and the Duchess of York, he was strongly influenced by the tragedies of the Roman playwright Seneca.

Dillon, Janette. "'I am myself alone': *Richard III."* In her *Shakespeare and the Solitary Man,* pp. 49-60. Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1981.

Describes Richard as "trapped between voluntary and involuntary types of isolation." Dillon sees the close of the playas the triumph of the social order over the "anarchic solitary" individual.

Fergusson, Francis. "Richard III" In *Shakespeare: The Pattern in his Carpet,* pp. 51-6. New York: Delacorte Press, 1970.

States that the character of Richard himself is the source of the play's energy and that Shakespeare drew upon history as well as upon classical and medieval drama to portray Richard as a heartless and comical villain.

Gurr, Andrew. "Richard ill and the Democratic Process." *Essays in Criticism* XXIV, No.1 (January 1974): 39-47.

Argues that Richard was not defeated by ghosts or by his own conscience but by Stanley's decision to fight for Richmond and thus to exercise his natural "democratic right" to choose a good ruler.

Heilman, Robert B. "Satiety and Conscience: Aspects of Richard III." *The Antioch Review* XXIV, No.1 (Spring 1964)' 57-73.

Remarks that Richard is not a stereotypical villain but a complex enough character to be regarded as a precursor to Shakespeare's later, tragic hero Macbeth.

Kott, Jan. "The Kings." In his *Shakespeare Our Contemporary,* translated by Boleslaw Taborski, pp. 3-46. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1965.

Discusses the kings in Shakespeare's history plays. Kott observes that Richard III first controls the pace and direction of history but is later destroyed by it.

Krieger, Murray. "The Dark Generations of *Richard III." Criticism* 1, No.1 (Winter 1959): 32-48.

Maintains that Richard is not completely in control of events in the play. Krieger asserts that Richard functions as a "purge" to rid England of a wicked past and as a "scourge" to punish those who are as guilty as he is, and that in this way the play resembles a Greek tragedy.

Muir, Kenneth. "Image and Symbol in Shakespeare's Histories." *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 50 (1967 1968): 103-23.

Observes that in addition to the frequent use of animal imagery in *Richard III* ("dog," "toad," etc.), there are also numerous images taken from drama, and that Richard himself plays roles.

Neill, Michael. "Shakespeare's Halle of Mirrors: Play, Politics, and Psychology in *Richard III." Shakespeare Studies* 8 (1980): 99-129.

Analyzes the theatrical imagery in *Richard III* as well as the frequent references to mirrors and reflections. Neill points out that this play is greatly concerned with "self": England divided against itself in civil war, Richard creating himself king, and Buckingham betraying himself.

Ritchey, David. "Queen Margaret *(Richard 11I):* A Production Note." *North Carolina Journal of Speech and Drama* 7, No.2 (1973): 37-41.

Identifies three interpretations of Margaret's role (as a chorus pointing to the past and predicting the future; as a defeated Lancastrian wanting retribution against the Yorkists; and as a ghost) and the difficulties they pose to productions of *Richard III.*

Rossiter, A.P. "Angel with Horns: The Unity of *Richard III."* In *Angel with Horns and other Shakespeare Lectures,* edited by Graham Storey, pp. 1-22. London: Longmans, 1961.

Examines the apparent disunity between the dire pronouncements of vengeance in the play and Richard's wicked but appealing buffoonery. Rossiter contends that the play is not a cut-and-dried "moral history"; instead it is a "comic history" presenting the ambiguities and contradictions of human lives.

Shaw, George Bernard. *Shaw on Shakespeare,* edited by Edwin Wilson, pp. 164-75. Freeport, New York: E.P. Dutton, 1961.

An anthology of Shaw's critical reviews of productions of *Richard III,* as well as Shaw's letter to an actor urging him to play the part of Richard.

Tanner, Stephen L. "Richard III versus Elizabeth: An Interpretation." *Shakespeare Quarterly* XXIV, No.4 (Autumn 1973): 468-72.

Asserts that, contrary to what Richard and some critics believe, Elizabeth wins the verbal battle with Richard over whether he will marry her daughter.

Velz, John W. "Episodic Structure in Four Tudor Plays: A Virtue of Necessity." *Comparative Drama* VI, No.2 (Summer 1972): 87-102.

Calls *Richard III* a one-man play whose "action is a series of . . . self-contained encounters with the protagonist. . . ." Velz explains that this format occurred because small Tudor acting companies had to double up on minor parts, and argues that Shakespeare turns this to his advantage in *Richard III.*

Weber, Karl. "Shakespeare's *Richard III,* I.iv.24-33." *Explicator* 38, No.3 (Spring 1980): 24-6.

Suggests that Clarence's vivid "undersea" nightmare in Act I "foreshadow[s] the rest of the play," as each image in the dream represents "the fate of England under Richard's rule."

Wilson, John Dover. Introduction to *Richard III,* by William Shakespeare, edited by John Dover Wilson, pp. vii-xiv. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954.

Overview of *Richard III,* with information on the play's composition date, sources, style, and critical reception.

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**Introduction**

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Shakespeare for Students (SfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Shakespeare for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Shakespeare for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Shakespeare for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Shakespeare for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

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Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Shakespeare for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

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Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Shakespeare for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

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Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

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