Teaching Richard III: The Politics of Performance and Assessment

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Reasons for never introducing high school students to Shakespeare's *Richard III* abound. Let's extrude a few of them, shall we? First, if students were only going to establish contact with Shakespeare once in their high school years, they might submit to many more accessible options. Granted, *Romeo and Juliet* has become virtually a cliché within the sophomore and junior-year curriculum, and its pairing with the redoubtable *West Side Story* is nearly guaranteed now to limit and depreciate the possibilities in Shakespeare's play like touring England on the web trivializes a person's contact with real English landscapes and what being in them actually means.

But still others—*Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, even *Midsummer Night's Dream*—probably merit students' and teachers' attention more than *Richard III* and, besides being all about our students in question, afford wonderful opportunities for introducing them to Shakespeare's mastery in character realization, matchless poetic expression, and Elizabethan and Jacobean conventions.

Besides, those of us who have read and taught *Richard III* know its difficulties—its tremendous length; the many long and windy speeches that require a running scorecard to keep their speakers straight; a fabric of a play that seems built more for direct and arch addresses (and even asides) to the audience rather than consistently spirited and coherent dialogue; a series

of conventions that seem to owe their origin to a much more medieval sensibility than the tragedies I have mentioned earlier in this paragraph—the almost "wooden Indian" stereotype of a Margaret figure that clanks before us as a vengeful ghost; the extended dream sequences in 5.3 in which already dead characters alternate speaking glowingly and damningly to the sleeping Richmond and Richard, the hand-wringing and endlessly evil-scheming "Machiavel" figure in Richard who approaches us in the first scene as a morality Vice-figure straight off a guild cart participating in an important event within the liturgical calendar.

And, if that's not enough, the play seems to lurch along like a punch-drunk prize fighter; of course we know that it's a revenge play, but who *are* all of these people? Who *are* they to each other? Isn't it a *fait accompli* that Richard will crash and burn by the end, given that he declares himself as indisputably and irredeemably evil from the first words of "This is the winter of our discontent"? What's to be learned from a thoroughly evil agenda other than the creative means by which Richard clears the stage of self-avowed upstanding and protesting victims, including the killing of a brother, the gratuitous seduction of a grieving widow of a young victim of Richard in the process of accompanying the body of another of Richard's victims, Henry VI, on the way to his burial, and the slaughter of a couple of innocent kids, one of whom appears to be the next in line for the crown of England? The play seems, on the face of it, an awful mess whose only discernible center is the virtuoso Richard, treating us to a medley of his greatest hits. Is that, as Peggy Lee intoned, all there is?

But there are *lots* of reasons for considering teaching *Richard III*, and it's worth traversing the afore-mentioned difficulties in order to open up some of the real lights of this dramatic experience. The play is a wonderful opportunity to "demystify" Shakespeare. That is, many of our students (and many of us!) approach Shakespeare with great trepidation. He's a god or at least an oracle, for Christ's sake, predisposed against making a mistake or having his characters or plots (actually *those* belong to many others!) or character interactions called into question.

And, of course, that's silly. Shakespeare can be seen to

be developing and maturing into his craft, just like those of us engaged in the teaching enterprise. Just like us, he has his good and bad days. But, most particularly, as Shakespeare is becoming comfortable with his playwriting function, peering down the alley outside the Globe to see people stream into the Swan to watch Christopher Marlowe's latest production, and trying to master the theatre conventions of the times, Shakespeare is unabashedly stealing like hell, imitating what works and fills the company cash box, and is keeping his ear to the street in order to keep the Lord Chamberlain's Men afloat, put people in the Globe's seats, and operate within a repertory system that placed tremendous demands on playwrights and actors (and sometimes, dependent upon the degree of efficiency with which members of a company have fully mastered a particular play, the audience as well!).

The bottom line here is that several of Shakespeare's early plays are flawed, often extremely derivative, and sometimes imperfect rip-offs of other playwrights' successful products. These early plays always, though, show us the budding genius of Shakespeare, a kind of diamond in the rough as it were, while allowing us glimpses of the theatre of the time. And *Richard III* occurs right at the end of that apprenticeship, beyond the unfortunate but blackly-funny-as-all-get-out *Titus Andronicus* of 1594 as well as the almost unstage-able (for fear of placing modern audiences in a group coma) *Henry VI* trilogy of the very early '90's. It's clear that he's created a leading character of great dynamism and charisma in Richard, and he's gotten beyond much of the almost universal declamatory delivery of lines by many of his characters in the Henry plays, but he's still stuck, it seems, in some of the most overused early Elizabethan conventions, nor does he seem to have progressed to the double plot phase of 1598 and beyond that shows him arraying characters in almost ensemble form and intermingling blank verse and prose speeches in very intentional ways.

So *Richard III* is a transitional play, situated between the earliest and worst stuff by Shakespeare and the onset of his brilliant phase. There's much to learn from looking at such a play, not the least of which is that Shakespeare is *human*, learning on the

fly as a quick but imperfect study of what is occurring so dizzyingly around him, adjusting to what provably draws crowds, and finding his feet. And demystifying Shakespeare and being able to laugh at what doesn't work or gasp at what so startlingly *does* gets us—teachers and students—closer to Shakespeare and prepares us to claim our selves when the play reflects them back to us.

The Assessment Piece— "To be or not to be, that is the question . ."

But that's not the only reason to teach it. What I've just been doing in the far too long and windy last couple of paragraphs is assess the relative quality of Shakepeare's *Richard III*. Imagine the temerity! But, what the heck, I'm a card-carrying grown-up and a teacher to boot whom my students expect to assess *them* six ways from Sunday. In fact, the kind of assessments I run of classes I teach at Minnesota State University on my desperate way toward determining what my students have learned may be flying out of control. Assessment isn't nonsense from where I sit; heck, I've delivered conference papers on the subject of assessment, and I've helped to run assessment workshops that attempted to show other faculty members the virtues of effective assessment.

The problem, though, is that assessment may have taken on a life of its own. Just ask my pedagogical comrade in arms and frustration, Scott Hall, how many trees he consumes in documenting his assessment of his students' performance in his English classes. And ask him again how much time he spends on testing what his students have and have not learned. A lot of this, he says, is done because it's mandated—no child's behind left behind—and Scott must adjust his teaching accordingly.

Of course, students understand what they're being subjected to as well. And, they may also have learned that all of those assessments have coalesced into a fairly irrefutable series of statements about who they are, where they are going, what their capabilities are, and the kinds of educational and professional choices that lie open to them. If assessment sounds like a strait jacket or jail cell, I may have overstated the case, but

only for effect, and not by much. If abused or waged in behalf of people whose interests deviate far from educational, assessment could become an end in itself, undermine student creativity, reduce the world to a set of right and wrong answers, and deprive students of the opportunity of learning how to ask questions that have no easy answers. Even worse, if students catch on to the "assessment game" and become savvy at how to play it, high school and general education college classes might just degenerate into cynical role-playing activities.

On a number of levels, that's what's going on in *Richard III*. A very self-interested kind of assessment has been levied against Richard before the play has even begun—it's happened in Shakespeare's historical sources, one of which is Thomas More's *History of King Richard III*.[1] As the play begins, Richard appears before us in full possession of that assessment, knowing that the die is cast against him ever being able to overturn it. As Richard intones his "this is the winter of my discontent" soliloquy and determines to outdo the badness of that assessment, it's no stretch that our students ought to be able to see themselves inscribed all over this play.

Historical Texts

However, before students can begin to see themselves in Richard and *Richard III*, they need to acquaint themselves with a little history. This, like brussel sprouts, is likely to go down hard initially. A high number of students have developed a distaste—even disdain—for any kind of history. After all, it's not *them*, not *now*, they complain; it's covered with the dust of irrelevance.

Their ignorance of history applies particularly to their own, and our students aren't alone in this regard—many of us, as teachers and parents, operate blithely with our headlights off when it comes to knowing our own history. It's amazing to hear the "founding fathers'" names being taken in vain to support any/every position without any real knowledge of who they were, who they were to each other, and what they believed in. But, when it comes to knowing something beyond our own country's brief and recent history, students are truly likely to balk. And, while

knowing about the events behind the actions of Shakespeare's play—it is, after all, a "history" play—isn't everything or even a prerequisite to entrance into Richard's world, it's illuminating.

Here's why. A tremendous welter of events occurring between the years of 1483 and 1485 spill one upon another into this play—that period surrounding the death of Edward IV, Richard's older brother; Richard's infinitesimally short regency of the Prince of Wales until his and his brother's murders in the Tower; the short and contentious reign of Richard, followed by Henry Richmond's entrance (the future Henry VII and the first of several Tudor kings and queens culminating in Shakespeare's time with Elizabeth) upon the English scene, and a final fight over the crown in the battle at Leicester where Richard uttered his famous cry "a horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse" and fell to Richmond.

In fact, that's one of the major fascinations that Shakespeare develops within the play-text—not only has Shakespeare shrunk three huge years into a three and a half-hour theatre experience, but he's swept lots of issues well beyond those years into the play, too. He means for the audience to feel the breakneck speed with which Richard makes things happen for the first four acts and then himself to feel the speed of events broken beyond his control and boring down upon him. Any reader or viewer of the play unaware of that critical time period will probably remain untouched by Shakespeare's intention.

But an appreciation of this potboiler of a play and the speed with which it unfolds depends on at least a minor grasp of earlier events that precede *Richard III* by anywhere from thirty to eighty-five years. Included among the bloody events of those times are some, not nearly all, of the following: the Wars of the Roses, fought between the years of 1455 and 1485; the end of the 100 Years War between the French and English that resulted in England losing all of the lands in France that it had won largely under Henry V up to 1421; the birth of the future Henry VI, only six months old when his illustrious father died, throwing his administration into the hands of those more loyal to their own interests while Henry VI grew into his mentally feeble and incompetent majority; Henry VI's marriage to

Margaret of Anjou, the Margaret of Shakespeare's play who not only wore Henry's pants but often led her own forces into battle in them, tried to rally French support for Henry VI's government in the 1450's during the civil wars ultimately won by the Yorkists in 1460, and agonized over her husband's murder in the tower and her only son's death on the battlefield; the wayward loyalties of Richard's other brother, the Duke of Clarence, who, perhaps largely due to his marriage to a daughter of Lord Neville, Margaret's closest advisor, briefly allied himself with Margaret against his brothers before seeing the light—Edward actually did have him arrested after ascending the throne and gave the order for his execution; a fairly undistinguished administration of Edward IV marked mostly by marital engagements with several women, a very public and dirty affair with a woman named Shore, and a decision to marry decidedly lower in class with Elizabeth and fill his cabinet with Elizabeth's relatives and favorites who, by her device, had been rewarded with titles and wealth. And, when the smoke clears in 1485, a very politically-minded Henry Richmond leads an army he's assembled in France against Richard, and, after defeating and killing him, embarks on a reign that sees the establishment of the very frightening Star Chamber (and a kind of secret police to go along with it), more repressive taxation, and a more centralized government. It wouldn't be a popular reign, but it would, at least, be an efficient tightening of royal prerogatives by a studied Machiavellian.[2]

Behind all of these events lies the most telling action of all—Richard II's forced deposition of the English crown in 1399 to Henry Bolingbroke, the future Henry IV (father of Henry V and grandfather of Henry VI), and his murder most probably carried out by Bolingbroke. It's hard to contemplate a more cataclysmic event than the murder of a legitimate sitting king—Shakespeare would probably have believed so, his Queen Elizabeth having spent all of her then forty-six year reign under an order of excommunication and as the object of many plots,

foreign and domestic, to divest her of her crown. The ambiguity of who would ultimately succeed her created a real national anxiety. In fact, all of Shakespeare's histories spin from this single event, and realizing its importance enables the knower to begin to grasp the providential view of history (that is, the notion of God as shaper of history and future events through his earthly agents, and avenger against the violent removal of one of them) that Shakespeare is enacting in *Richard III*.

But there's still more. It's Richard. It's about who he is represented to be in the play and who he actually *was*. And, although finding the *real* Richard is likely to introduce the seeker to a minefield of very partisan pleading and questionable information—it's hard to imagine a more biased web site than the one assembled by the Richard the Third Society![3]—some patience and powers of discrimination will reveal some important truths about the real Richard that are at odds with Shakespeare's Richard. Was Richard actually physically misshapen and born with a full set of choppers?—not likely, beyond carrying one shoulder lower than the other as a result of brandishing a heavy broadsword very efficiently from the back of a horse over an illustrious military career. Was he a calculating and delighted doer of evil?—probably not, certainly when it came to his very even-handed and humane administration of the North over so many years, during which time he's praised for extending legal redress to so many who had previously had no access to it. Did he plan and carry out the killing of his brother, the Duke of Clarence?—no, since he was probably out of town at the time and, when he found out it was going to happen, rushed to London to attempt, unsuccessfully, to talk Edward out of it. Did he kill Henry VI in the Tower?—it's impossible to say, except that this probably would have been Edward's call, not the very young (nineteen in 1460) Richard's. Did he kill his own wife Anne?—the facts of the relationship argue against it, since they'd been married happily for many years in what appears at all counts as a love match and suffered in mourning at the unexpected death of their only son, that death being supposed to be

the reason for Anne's passing not long after. And—here's the real kicker—does history hold Richard responsible for the murders of the two young princes in the Tower?—lots of ink, both in the interests of fact-finding and fiction-creating, have been spilled to answer the question; the kids were no doubt killed, but, even though extravagant detection mechanisms like carbon dating have been employed, no definite answer has emerged.

So what? Why should we—or our students—care? Well, because a quite intentionally *fictional* construction of Richard has been front-loaded into this play. More than that, and we'll get to this a bit later, this fictional construction preexists any action in the play—it exists and has been almost universally accepted as who Richard *is* before he utters word one of his opening soliloquy. And it's important to note that a character delivering an extended soliloquy to the audience before we've seen him say or do *anything* is an odd and rare circumstance; in fact, I've found no other instance in any other play by Shakespeare. Has Richard *earned* this construction, real or fictional, by anything he might have done? We don't know. All we *do* know is that Richard confronts us with a portrait of malevolence that is insuperable—like a Karl Rove political attack ad, a series of general catch phrases repeated so persistently that they have become Richard's reality. And Richard, seeing no way to dissociate whatever his real self may be from this demonizing verbal one, determines to *be* it, with a vengeance.

Did Shakespeare *know* that he was working with a false conception of Richard, and, if he did, did he care? Again, no ultimate answer exists. But we know a few things. First, we know—and our students should gain at least fragmentary exposure to—the primary "historical" source of Shakespeare's Richard: Thomas More's early sixteenth-century *History of King Richard III*. If objectivity is a bad thing, then this is a great historical source. More paints within it the vilest picture of Richard and blames him for every possible offense short of the temptation of Adam and Eve. Any close comparison of Shakespeare's play and More's *History* will unmistakably reveal the extent to which Shakespeare is indebted to More for the portrayal of Richard as

irremediably evil, egoistical, physically ugly, and almost limitless in his talent for inventing ways to entrap and dispatch his victims.

More's *History* is, indeed, so broad in demonizing Richard that it's funny, and, perhaps, intentionally so. More was a brilliant man, a "man for all seasons" as a Christian humanist capable of writing wonderfully insightful and piercing and self-protectively veiled satires against misused authority such as *The Utopia*.[4] But, besides being a dedicated religious man wearing a hair shirt under his clothes, he was also, sometimes reluctantly, a practical politician attempting to soften and humanize the actions and policies of his sovereign, Henry VIII. And, of course, his dedication to principle over the issue of Henry's divorce to marry Elizabeth I's mother cost More his life. Not the kind of educated, enlightened guy one would expect to wholeheartedly, delightedly, and uncomplicatedly enter into the writing of a piece of vitriolic propaganda like his *History* unless he had other less obvious intentions. Neither did he appear to have had high regard for "historical scholars" like Polydore Vergil whom Henry VII had hired as dedicated demonizers of Richard III after the fact and apologists for his own administration since entering England from France and leading an insurrection that ended with the killing of a king.[5] Sound vaguely familiar?

Whatever More may have been doing with his history, he had spent most of his life doing *real* scholarship and publishing it. He knew the difference between history, drama, and self-promotion, and a man of such proven balance in his religious and political views would not have intentionally been a party to the dissemination of lies—clearly, his dearest friend and fellow Christian humanist Erasmus wasn't when he laid bare the Catholic Church's attempts to intimidate him into ceasing his constructive attacks against it.[6] Importantly, More never sought to publish his *History*; it was published well after his death in 1557.

Whatever his *History* was to More, whatever enjoyment it may have afforded him in parodying the style of that clutch of promoters of Henry VII that were contemporary with More in the court, so compelling and theatrical was that fictional portrait of Richard that More drew that it became the version of "histo-

ry" that later historians like Hall and Holinshed based their own histories upon. Thus, the perpetuation of a fictional construction of Richard that passes for history at a time—the 1580's and 1590's—when the English citizenry, flushed with the victories over the Armada and the Catholic Anti-Christ, can't get enough of representations of a country newly growing into a sense of itself.

So, where was Shakespeare on the question of the reliability of his source? Who knows? And it doesn't matter anyway, for two reasons—the theatricality of the character of Richard ("there's no business like show business") as represented in More's *History* would have likely drawn Shakespeare to it like a magnet, as did Richard's potentially rich relationship with "audiences." By "audiences" I mean not just cast members and ticketholders who watch Richard perform his nefarious deeds, but those who, considerably earlier than the commission of those deeds, have colluded in the creation of a character and stage identity for Richard, for reasons that may be apparent later in this discussion.

Shakespeare clearly saw the theatrical possibilities in building a play around More's character—such a hand-wringing delighter in evil would be guaranteed to fill the Globe. And Shakespeare didn't have to believe in the historical truth of the character to imagine the magnetic relationship it could establish with its audience.[7] And Shakespeare might have been attracted to staging the moral ambiguities inherent in a Richard character capable of being drawn broadly like Marlowe's Barabas—physically reprehensible and so exceptionally different from all others around him; psychologically complex, illimitably devious and creative in his plots to strike against his detractors.

The tradition of the stage Machiavel would have recommended such a character to Shakespeare, but Shakespeare would have realized that Marlowe's Barabas character (and the Richard character he was in the act of conceiving) exceeded the hand-wringing and aside-delivering stage type that audiences had loved to hate. Marlowe and Shakespeare both imagined characters who looked ugly and loved to do evil, who were clearly isolates and outsiders, but who were inspired to be so by a group of insiders capable of doing what the ugly evil characters did (but with not

nearly as much style and panache). These insiders' interests seem best served by constructing and imposing upon their respective enemies an evil role that, whether these characters wished to accept it or not, *became* who they were. Pretty powerful stuff.

Ugly and evil characters earlier than Barabas and Richard hadn't been designed to occupy the lead in a theatrical production—they'd heretofore been merely stage devices to be dispatched at the appropriate time. And, even more importantly, both Marlowe and Shakespeare invested their evil characterizations with something no two-dimensional Machiavel was capable of demonstrating—a complex interior, individuality, the capacity to change and grow through the production, if only a little. A character, no matter what evil deeds he has committed, becomes human when he begins, only for a moment, to reflect on the consequences of his actions and his responsibilities for them. And, when an admittedly evil character like Barabas or Richard become even slightly human, we then see them as well as those insiders who had gained such an advantage by isolating and demonizing these evil characters in a considerably more complex way.

Performance and Assessment—Bringing Our Students' Text Into the Play

And that appears to be what Shakespeare may have used More's version of Richard to portray. There are two related issues, and exciting and absolutely contemporary ones for our students, that Shakespeare's *Richard III* stages, and they are inextricably related—performance and assessment. For us and for Shakespeare, the issue of performance is two-fold. First, there's the idea of play, acting a part in a production, or improvisational role-playing. It's what Shakespeare's characters do while they're on stage. But reading and re-constructing Hamlet has taught us that "performance" is the social role that some people cloak themselves in to hide their true intentions. Such social performances can confuse and alienate a character like Hamlet who, in his extended adolescence, is trying to discover himself and resist the imposition on his complex character of a social role and expectations that powerful others want him to play. And they'll

win more power over Hamlet if they can make him play it. On the other hand, Hamlet derives his only true peace and happiness in the world of the play from theatre and the visiting company of players—there's safety and clarity in recalling and reciting a set speech, of occupying the role of a theatrical character whose lines, gestures, and relationship to other characters in a production can be mastered and will not change. Play offers stability, control, engagement in a group of similarly-interested players, and the chance to escape, if only briefly, from a very ambiguous world.

On the other hand, assessment constitutes the other side of performance. It's the press notices from critics that members of an acting company wait so anxiously to read after opening night. How were we? How did we do? What did the critics think? How did they rate our production in comparison to other shows of its type? Will the show produce good box office? What criteria did they use to evaluate us, and did those criteria seem fair?

But assessment, for us and our students, has become a much stickier wicket. Students probably understand—Scott and I did in the distant days when we were students—that they are being assessed nearly 100 percent of the time: by teachers in so many ways in each of their classes, in terms of their academic performance but also in terms of their attitude, maturity, sense of responsibility, social interactive abilities, leadership qualities, level and success of engagement in school-related activities, ability to follow directions, overall behavior, and on and on. And they have probably begun to catch on to the more subtle aspects of assessment in the schools—their subjection to batteries of tests that assess their intellectual development and aptitude for particular jobs and tasks. Even if they haven't paid attention to public policy, they know about "No Child Left Behind" and manic application of standardized testing to measure what they have learned and whether that "what" is sufficient to push them and their school over the rung of assessment acceptability (and funding!). They may or may not know that a "book" has been kept on each of them from the first day they've stepped inside a school building. Or that it gradually sketches in the details of an assessment "profile" that eventually will have a great deal to do

with what college they attend (if that profile determines that they are, indeed, "college material") and the person they will become.

Sound Orwellian? And we know, beyond the obviously pernicious features of this assessment system that seems designed to drive the majority of us toward the safe, soft, cream-filled center of mediocrity (where we and our schools are judged to be "okay"), that assessment means something far more complex for our students. The culture of a student body is driven by sub-cultures or "cliques." Some of these we choose ourselves while some are obviously chosen for us by the way we look, and the length or style of our hair and our choice of clothes. There's invariably a kind of official or unofficial "board of review" consisting of extremely popular and attractive young people who oversee the way the student culture sifts out. There are intentionally established pecking orders among the constellation of cliques in any given school operating with the same brutal efficiency as a prison.

And assessment rules. Decisions of assessment result in the identification of clique labels like "the collegiates," "the geeks," "the jocks," and "the greasers," and I'll restrict myself here to the labels I can safely use in polite conversation. Most of us still possessed of short-term memory remember how painful much of this sub-culture assessment was and how it operated on foregone conclusions about things we couldn't change about ourselves. Most of us wouldn't repeat high school even knowing what we do now because of memories of how the niche determined for us to occupy caused us to be treated by others—the options ranged anywhere from acceptance to exclusion, an impossibly busy social calendar to harassment, mockery, or, worse still, victimization by bullies. It took, in my imperfect memory, a very rare person to be permitted to cross the acknowledged boundaries that separated one student sub-culture from another and to gain acceptance and membership in both, or more than two. As the well-known grunge song title goes, "it smells like team spirit." Or, much more to the point, the picture I've sketched of the student culture of a typical school that operates by an implicit reliance upon as-

sessment might summon up ominous images of Columbine.[8]

So what's the relationship between performance and assessment here? It's really complex and intertwined. The movers and the shakers of the larger group agree at least tacitly on the roles that must be acceptably played to gain admission into the most desirable sub-groups. And, make no mistake about it, those rules may be as strict as any required to occupy any conventional stage type to be played in a Shakespearean production—the "look," the dress, the "talk," the music signature, the activities are all requisite evaluative criteria for "belonging." And, conversely, the movers and shakers survey the scene and attach less than complimentary labels—stereotypes—to the behavior, dress, hygienic habits, drinking or drug preferences, speech, attachment to loud and fast vehicles of peers they find disreputable or distasteful. The labels, once attached, become virtually impossible to shake. They become, for some, tickets to social ostracism or alienation. For others, the assessments become self-fulfilling prophecies. That is to say, if I can't shake the label—if I'm going to be stuck with a limiting evaluation of myself even though I recognize that evaluation as a frightful oversimplification of who I really am with no hopes of changing it except by moving out of town to a new school (and we all know how *that's* likely to play out!), then maybe I'll just dedicate myself with a fine and applied and anti-social intention to *becoming* the most frightening expression of that label that anyone could possibly imagine. Oops, the spectre of Columbine looms again.

It's our view that, in order to make Richard and *Richard III* meaningful and relevant to our students, we need to enable them to see that *they* are in this play and, although it's perhaps a huge stretch to possibly conceive of themselves in the hedge-hogged and abortive and hunch-backed and evil-breeding personage of Richard (trust me, the majority already sees themselves as more than a little hedge-hogged!), in the character of Richard, too. Preparing them to make those contemporary connections from something four hundred and ten years ago about a set of political circumstances about five hundred and twenty

years old requires that we engage them in a couple of writing prompts and have them share what they've written on these prompts with other class members. We have currently dedicated about five minutes each to the first four of these prompts:

1.Are there social groups or cliques at your high school, and, if so, could you identify as many of them as you can with the names that are used to refer to them?
2. What group or groups do you see *you* fit in best? Why?
3. What group do *others* see you fitting in with? Why?
4. What assessment criteria do you understand your having to fill in order to gain admission to your group?

The Play text is the Thing

But, once we're beyond students' responses, where do we start? Actually, just about anywhere, but, without hesitation, the opening soliloquy first. And those prompts might actually make this window into Richard's soul more luminous, more accessible. To sustain the metaphor of assessment within the soliloquy, Richard's attitude may be sour or alienated here because his older brother has all the toys, the prettiest girls in the senior class, and has named himself the president of partying. All serious business has been placed on hold, says Richard as he refers to either his own special ironically royal "winter of *our* discontent made glorious summer by this son of York." The "our" word is tellingly sustained as Richard darkly mocks a court dedicated to silliness and solipsism:

> Now are our brows bound with victorious
> wreaths,
> Our bruised arms hung up for monuments,
> Our stern alarums chang'd to merry meetings,
> Our dreadful marches to delightful measures.
> (*RIII* 1.1.5-8)[9]

Instead of responsible leadership to heal the wounds of state after a long and bitterly contested civil war, members of Edward's privileged clique of insiders have isolated themselves to watch the king dance "nimbly in a lady's chamber/To the lascivious pleasing of a lute" (*RIII* 1.1.12-13).

In the next twenty-five lines of the soliloquy, though, Richard indicates just how far outside his brother's privileged clique (the sardonic "our") he has been cast, how he has been defined as an outsider, and how that alienated outside position has provoked him to strike back by seeking revenge:

> But I, that am not shap'd for sportive tricks,
> Nor made to court an amorous looking-glass;
> I, that am rudely stamp'd, and want love's
> majesty
> To strut before a wanton ambling nymph;
> I, that am curtail'd of this fair proportion,
> Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,
> Deform'd, unfinish'd, sent before my time
> Into this breathing world, scarce half made up,
> And that so lamely and unfashionable"
> That dogs bark at me as I halt by them—
> Why, I, in this weak piping time of peace,
> Have no delight to pass away the time,
> Unless to see my shadow in the sun
> And descant on mine own deformity.
> 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. (*RIII*
> 1.1.14-31)

The rest of his speech is very subject-specific—he's thought rather concretely who he'll be directing his long-cultivated rage at (the crops are definitely in!): it's the schematic of a stereotypical revenge play (foment a hatred between Edward and Clarence, imprison and arrange the

murder of his brother Clarence who has played both sides against the middle during the wars, arrogate the stereotypical role of Machiavel and be "subtle, false and treacherous").

But the heart of the soliloquy portrays—and we must believe it if soliloquies provide our only real opportunity to see into the soul of Shakespeare's characters—an identity that has been encased in a most theatrical stereotype delivered by a voice that sounds only too aware of having been cast in such a broadly stereotypic and limiting self. He's aware of the irony. The "mirror" image that recurs in relation to Richard at several junctures is not used idly here. Most of us don't see ourselves in the mirror; rather, we see our own deficiencies, as we perceive them, when measured against the unrealistic standard of those who don't have them. That is, we may not see what we want to see—a reflection of what we see in others we wish to emulate.

Similarly, the verbal perception of self may also be a mirror—as Jaques Lacan explained it in his ground-breaking "mirror-phase" essay, we become alienated from ourselves once we've accessed the symbology of language.[10] That language system, managed by the controllers of language, projects the construction of reality (not my or your reality) prevalent in society and agreed upon by those that wield it. And that isn't Richard.

Could what he's telling us be literally true? Could he actually be a hunch-backed, stoop-shouldered, prematurely-born deformity equipped with a full set of teeth? Could he be so lame and unfashionable as to set the dogs to barking? Could *this* have been the youngest child that his mother had given birth to? Not likely. It certainly would be a prodigious feat for him to lead an army of horse soldiers into full battle with any hope of success in such a lop-sided state and still be able to manage his broad sword. Besides, the language seems too arch, too wildly theatrical to be taken as anything more than someone's most hyperbolic metaphor to express someone else's internal moral state. Is Richard a Vice figure, the kind of paste board construction that would play the devil's part in a medieval miracle play? The only way that this could be true is if these phrases had been repeated so frequently *ad nauseam* like

memorable sound bites over the length and breadth of a political stump that, eventually, fiction would finally become reality. Richard seems to be delivering the lines with no small amount of knowing irony. And faced with the prospect of living that stereotypical role, Richard promises to get even by radically enacting the part. His best defense, then, is a good offense.

Now, it would be *one* thing if Richard were the only offender, the only perpetrator of disorder, the only self-serving personality in the world of the play. If that were indeed the case, then the verbal construction of Richard as evil incarnate would be confirmed, regardless of whether the "evil" label arrived before Richard did. But a brief look at portions of the first four scenes in the play may convince students that the moral environment of the play is muddy at best. In 1.2, Richard views an apparently grieving Anne, her husband recently killed in the wars, escorting the body of her recently murdered father-in-law, Henry VI, to his burial. Under the circumstances, nothing could be more loathsome to Anne than the supposed murderer of both her husband and Henry, unless it be that murderer attempting to woo her to be his wife! And, one must say, Anne appears to have fully bought the stereotype that Richard has indicated is current in his soliloquy:

> Richard. Sweet Saint, for charity, be not so
> curst.
> Anne. Foul devil, for God's sake, hence, and
> trouble us not,
> For thou hast made the happy earth thy hell,
> Fill'd it with cursing cries and deep exclaims.
> If thou delight to view thy heinous deeds,
> Behold this pattern of thy butcheries.
> O gentlemen, see, see! dead Henry's wounds
> Open their congeal'd mouths and bleed afresh!
> Blush, blush, thou lump of foul deformity …
> (*RIII* 1.2.49-57)[11]

Bad stuff. An insuperable obstacle to overcome, her grief and rage. And she confronts Richard so defiantly. Yet it takes astonishingly few lines for Anne to move from damning epithets

like "homicide," "fouler toad," and "hedgehog" to a revolting turnabout as Richard offers her his sword with which to kill him:

> Anne. I would I knew thy heart.
> Richard. 'Tis figured in my tongue.
> Anne. I fear me both are false.
> Richard. Then never [was man] true.
> Anne. Well, well, put up your sword.
> Richard. Say then my peace is made.
> Anne. That shalt thou know hereafter.
> Richard. But shall I live in hope?
> Anne. All men, I hope, live so.
> Richard. Vouchsafe to wear this ring.
> Anne. To take is not to give. (*RIII* 1.2.192-202)

What's just happened here? And our students wish to know as well. In the space of a little over one hundred lines, Anne has caved. Because of personal weakness? Because her grief has left her vulnerable to Richard's amatory assault? It's difficult to know, and, after all, the play is about *speed*, the absolute breakneck swiftness with which Richard determines what to do and then enacts it. But, as Richard congratulates himself at the end of the scene, promises to rid himself of Anne at the first opportunity, and rushes to find a mirror that may confirm that he is not as ugly as advertised—"Upon my life, she finds (although I cannot)/Myself to be a marv'llous proper man" (*RIII* 1.2.253-54)—we're left with gnawing questions about Anne's moral compass.

But she's not the only one. The next scene, 1.3, terribly confuses the difficulty of knowing the good guys from the bad guys. King Edward is deathly ill, and his wife Elizabeth is discussing the subject with her brother Rivers, just one of the many family favorites and hangers-on that she's filled the court's roll with. Her self-concerned query?: "If he were dead, what would betide on me?" (*RIII* 1.3.6). In the ensuing conversation, it appears to be all about power, all about maintaining one's advantaged position, and not at all about the health and well-being of the state and its citizens.

Richard's stagy entrance stirs the contentious pot even more vigorously. His performance, most appropriately, will feature a wronged and offended and slighted Richard, misrepresented by his competitors for power. But, ironically, much of what Richard delivers so theatrically is spot on:

> They do me wrong, and I will not endure it!
> Who is it that complains unto the King
> That I, forsooth, am stern, and love them not?
> By holy Paul, they love his Grace but lightly
> That fill his ears with such dissentious rumors,
> Because I cannot flatter and look fair,
> Smile in men's faces, smooth, deceive, and cog,
> Duck with French nodes and apish courtesy,
> I must be held a rancorous enemy.
> Cannot a plain man live and think no harm,
> But thus his simple truth must be abus'd
> With silken, sly, insinuating Jacks? (*RIII* 1.3.42-53)

Certainly Richard is performing the role of a plain and harmless man, and it won't be the last time, but he's right that Elizabeth and her crew are nasty and self-serving backbiters. He doesn't hesitate to tell Grey, one of Elizabeth's sons, that he's speaking, among others, to "thee, that hast nor honesty nor grace" (*RIII* 1.3.55). We may doubt whether to take Richard's word about Elizabeth and her court that has left him "disgrac'd, and the nobility/Held in contempt, while great promotions/Are daily given to ennoble those/That scarce some two days since were worth a noble" or whether his words to Rivers about Elizabeth are to be fully believed: "She may help you to many fair preferments,/And then deny her aiding hand therein/And lay those honors on your high desert" (*RIII* 1.3.78-81, 1.3.94-96). But, if Richard is wrong, Elizabeth's and her family's arguments are weak or non-existent. Whatever Richard is doing here, or whatever role he had determined to perform, this court is a moral mess of self interest, wasted resources, and indolence.

And all of this, and more, becomes clear when Margaret arrives on the scene. Like a ghost hovering invisibly over the stage, Margaret observes and delivers a critique on this group's bickerings. She knows all of them, has lost her crown because of their actions and decisions, and, as she enters their midst like a wooden Indian pushed into place on a hand truck, she embarks upon the most theatricalized of the many theatrical roles performed by any character in the play. Interestingly, it's taken all of them no time to turn their vitriol on Margaret. None of them is exempted from Margaret's scathing review of *their* performances:

> What? Were you snarling all before I came,
> Ready to catch each other by the throat,
> And turn you all your hatred now on me?
> 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?
> (*RIII* 1.3.187-92)

"Wrangling pirates" is a wonderful epithet to use on this turf-protecting bunch of individualists, and Margaret uses it as prelude to curses on Elizabeth, Rivers, Dorset, Lord Hastings, Buckingham, and, of course, Richard—in her view, the worst of this group only by degree. Her words to Richard recall Anne's stereotypical assessment, except here it's even more hyperbolic:

> 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—(*RIII*
> 1.3.227-32)

If ever there were an embodiment of Revenge in perfect line with the list of conventions affiliated with the traditional revenge tragedy, Margaret fits the bill. She's virtually that supernatural presence, returned from banishment (and the grave, actually, if we were reading *real* history), providing a clear list of wrongs and wrong-doers, a preview of coming attractions for the revenges that will need to be enacted to satisfy this shrill declamatory presence, and a sense of what it will take to establish justice in the play from a voice of moral clarity, Margaret seems to be it.

But Shakespeare has complicated our sense of Margaret, and students need to be invited to see this complication. Margaret can't escape blame for her actions during the wars no matter how loudly she rants—historically, this was a strong, intelligent woman, providing her supporters and her mentally weakened husband the leadership that they sorely needed. This was a woman who led men into battle. And, to use the fictionalized version of Margaret that Shakespeare created for the *Henry VI* plays, she is vicious, merciless, and capable of foul acts. Richard remembers the public humiliation that Margaret subjected his captured father to during the battle at Wakefield, how she had prepared a mockery of a crown out of a dirty piece of paper and set it on his head, presented him with a bloody napkin soaked with the blood of his second son (ordered murdered by Margaret), and took an active part in the group stabbing that followed:

> The curse of my noble father laid on thee
> When thou didst crown his warlike brows with
> paper,
> And with scorns drew'st rivers from his eyes,
> And then, to dry them, gav'st the Duke a clout
> Steep'd in the faultless blood of pretty
> Rutland—
> His curses then, from bitterness of soul
> Denounc'd against thee, are all fall'n upon thee;
> And god, not we, hath plagu'd thy bloody deed!
> (*RIII* 1.3.173-80)

It's important that the "Machiavel" Richard delivers these horrific truths about Margaret. They complicate the role of revenge and moral clarity she's representing. And that role is undercut, and the moral ambiguity of the play's environment even more muddied, by this brief exchange between Richard and Margaret following Margaret's interrupted phrase "Thou Detested--"

> Richard. Margaret!
> Margaret. Richard!
> Richard. Ha!
> Margaret. I call thee not.
> Richard. I cry thy mercy then; for I did think
> that
> thou hast call'd me all these bitter names.
> 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." (*RIII* 1.3.233-38)

And the very self-interested Elizabeth momentarily finds herself on the same side as Richard when she gloats, "Thus have you breath'd your curse against yourself." Talk about contending assessments!

But the behaviors of still more people in this royal private club are rendered questionable, even while Richard has set the stage for his victimization of them. In 1.4, we meet brother Clarence, languishing in jail because of Richard and also, it seems, because of his older brother Edward. Informal assessment of Clarence and his self-referential use of language starts early, as he indicates that he has just awakened from a terrifying dream and his keeper makes the mistake of asking him to tell him about it. In typically hyperbolic language, Clarence embarks on an imaginative pot-boiler in which he is on a boat in the process of crossing the channel from France with Richard, looking back toward England and "cit[ing] up a thousand heavy times,/During the wars of York and Lancaster,/that had befall'n us" (*RIII* 1.4.14-

16). As they pace the deck, Clarence imagines that Richard, while stumbling, has managed to knock him out of the boat into "the tumbling billows of the main." It only gets better from there:

> O Lord, methought what pain it was to drown!
> What dreadful noise of [waters] in [my] ears!
> What sights of ugly death within [my] eyes!
> Methought I saw a thousand fearful wracks;
> A thousand men that fishes gnaw'd upon;
> Wedges of gold, great anchors, heaps of pearl,
> Inestimable stones, unvalued jewels,
> All scatt'red in the bottom of the sea:
> Some lay in dead men's skulls, and in the holes
> Where eyes did once inhabit, there were crept
> (As 'twere in scorn of eyes) reflecting gems,
> That woo'd the slimy bottom of the deep,
> And mock'd the dead bones that lay scatt'red
> by. (*RIII* 1.4.21-33)

When his keeper asks skeptically how Clarence could have had the time and presence to have observed the "secrets of the deep" so carefully, Clarence turns the verbal spigot back on and explains that his dream was extended beyond his death.

So, for the playgoer, there is no rest for the weary as Clarence painstakingly itemizes every detail of what followed:

> O then began the tempest to my soul!
> I pass'd (methought) the melancholy flood,
> With that sour ferryman which poets write of,
> Unto the kingdom of perpetual night.
> The first thing that there did greet my stranger
> soul
> Was my great father-in-law, renowned Warwick,
> Who spake aloud, "What scourge for perjury
> Can this dark monarch afford false Clarence?"
> (*RIII* 1.4.44-51)

After conveying the vivid visitation of the bloody shade of Henry VI's son Edward whom Clarence had killed at Tewksbury, Clarence describes "a legion of foul fiends" that bedeviled so loudly that he finally awoke believing that he was still residing in hell (*RIII* 1.4.58).

An incredibly long-winded utterance. Most theatrically delivered as if his audience were considerably larger than just his keeper. Clarence has infused much guilt in his rendition of his dream vision. He clearly has reason to feel guilty in fighting for the Yorkists, abandoning them for the Lancastrian side, and then rejoining once again the forces of his brother King Edward just in time to kill a very young and untested Lancastrian prince. And, his conscience not withstanding, this man *needs* to die, not just because his loyalty to either side is impossible to ascertain but because it's the only sure way to make him shut up.

We know that's going to happen presently as Brackenbury encounters the murderers commissioned by Richard to finish him off and reads the letter of surety they carry. All that's left is some wonderful comic business involving an overly voluble Clarence attempting earnestly to religiously convert the murderers. He almost succeeds in talking them out of the deed—"And are you yet to your own souls so blind/That you will war with God by murd'ring me?/O, sirs, consider, they that set you on/To do this deed will hate you for the deed" (*RIII* 1.4.252-55). But one of them finally acts to end Clarence's sermonizing with a stab in the back and a quick flip into a butt of malmsey. Certainly it's a murder. And it's wrong, no matter what Clarence may have done to deserve it. But, on the other hand, Richard may have done the larger audience a great favor by removing Clarence from the cast. This is murder by poetic justice, and there's great black comedy in the doing of it. If ever a character has been done away with as an act of assessment, Clarence is it.

As the play turns the corner into the second act, there's one more instance of assessment against those who've cast Richard as the play's Vice figure. In a way, it signals a brief return to the private royal cortege that Margaret had delivered her rant

to just a couple of scenes earlier. But, this time, a nearly dead Edward orders his bickering group of insiders to do the impossible: swear oaths of love and peace with their competitors, and to "dissemble not" in the process. The oaths nearly provoke laughter until Richard enters to burst their hypocritical bubble:

> Hastings. So thrive I, as I truly swear the like!
> [. . . . .]
> Rivers. And I, as I love Hastings with my heart!
> [. . . . .]
> Elizabeth. There, Hastings, I will never more
> remember
> Our former hatred, so thrive I and mine.
> [. . . . .]
> Dorset. This interchange of love, I here protest,
> Upon my part shall be inviolable.
> [. . . . .]
> Buckingham. When ever Buckingham doth
> turn his hate
> Upon your Grace (to the Queen), but with all
> duteous love
> Doth cherish you and yours, God punish me
> With hate in those where I expect most
> love!
> 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.
> (*RIII* 2.1.11-40)

And, after swearing similarly that "'Tis death to me to be at enmity" and "thank[ing] my God for my humility," Richard shatters the peace and ensures that his brother Edward will die a guilt-ridden death soon by exposing Elizabeth's hypocrisy that Clarence be included in the love-fest: "Who knows not that the gentle Duke is dead?" (*RIII* 2.1.61, 73, 80).

There's no denying that Richard has authored Clar-

ence's murder, or that he has nothing but contempt for those he's shocked by his revelation. However, Edward agonizes over having actually given the execution order. And, in a long speech, he recalls only good about Clarence, even in his disloyalty, and he maligns the rest of the court for protecting their own interests by never speaking in Clarence's behalf to Edward:

> 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 beg for his life.
> O God! I fear thy justice will take hold
> On me and you, and mine and yours, for this.
> (*RIII* 2.1.127-33)

And he's right. There's no justice in this court—merely rampant individualism. And, as the violence is about to escalate, Edward's assessment of his court has nearly provided Richard the justification to act as God's scourge against a fairly nasty lot. Not that he needs an excuse.

Edward's death clears the way for Richard's virtuoso prosecution of revenge and his parallel rise to power nearly as quickly as one can aim and fire an automatic weapon. In rapid succession, Richard does away with Dorset and Gray and Hastings, behaving in self-assessed "formal Vice, Iniquity" fashion (*RIII* 3.1.82). And his undoing of Hastings is particularly adroit. Hastings—cocksure of himself and his supposed friendship with Richard in his steadfast support of Edward's little son as successor to the crown, recklessly ignoring warnings from Lord Stanley, and untroubled about having shared a mistress of longstanding (Shore) with the king—entraps himself in a charge of treason against Richard by confidently swearing loyalty to all three in the council in the Tower called to choose the coronation date; he's rewarded with a speedy beheading. With Edward's kids secreted safely in the Tower, Richard need only perform two actions in order to fully hold the reins of state: canvas the people for their sup-

port for his kingship and then, if he has the heart for it, kill the kids.

In 3.7, Richard's schemes to gain the hearts and minds of the people demonstrate as much "spin" as the most staged and controlled party convention or any campaign stop along the hustings that involves careful management of the "message," the image, and the audience. The beginning of 3.7 finds Buckingham operating behind the scenes as Richard's campaign manager and "dirty tricks" agent, and his discussion with Richard about devices for swaying public opinion comes loaded with all of the linguistic baggage of the play. This could be a sequence we could access from a recent episode of *The West Wing* or an insider's reportage of a piece of the last presidential campaign:

> Richard. How now, how now, what say the citizens?
> Buckingham. Now, by the holy Mother of our
> Lord,
> The citizens are mum, say not a word.
> Richard. Touch'd you the bastardy of
> Edward's children?
> Buckingham: I did, with his contract with Lady
> Lucy,
> And his contract by deputy in France,
> Th' unsatiate greediness of his desire,
> And his enforcement of the city wives,
> His tyranny for trifles, his own bastardy,
> As being got, your father then in France,
> And his resemblance, being not like the Duke.
> Withal I did infer your lineaments,
> Being the right idea of your father,
> Both in your form and nobleness of mind;
> Laid open all your victories in Scotland,
> Your discipline in war, wisdom in peace,
> Your bounty, virtue, fair humility;
> Indeed, left nothing fitting for your purpose
> Untouch'd or slightly handled in discourse.
> And when [mine] oratory drew [to an] end,

> I bid them that did love their country's good
> Cry, "God save Richard, England's royal king!"
> (*RIII* 3.7.1-22)

Karl Rove could hardly do a better job of promoting the candidate, keeping the message simple, scripting attack ads, and rallying the base. But, as Buckingham reports, almost like a stage manager reporting backstage to the lead actor a crowd's reception of a performance, they have responded "But like dumb statues, or breathing stones,/Star'd at each on other, and look'd deadly pale" (*RIII* 3.7.25-26). Buckingham has gone so far as to plant supporters in the audience, with no effect.

However, he arranges for a second performance before the Lord Mayor, his aldermen, and more citizens, this time coaching Richard to "Play the maid's part" (*RIII* 3.7.51). In a brilliant performance facilitated by Buckingham, Richard enters equipped with an open Bible and surrounded by prelates, at least as "earnest in the service of my God" as any born-again believer (*RIII* 3.7.105). Playing the fearful and unworthy and now unworldly disdainer of politics that "my desert/Unmeritable shuns your high request," Richard parlays Buckingham's plea for his public service in light of Edward's dissolute rule into a reluctant acceptance, to the adulation of all who've been favored by his canny improvisation:

> Will you enforce me to a world of cares?
> Call them again, I am not made of stones,
> But penetrable to your kind entreaties,
> Albeit against my conscience and my soul. (*RIII*
> .3.7.223-26)

With only the kids' fate to contend with, Richard engages Buckingham in a calculated piece of "prompting." Up to this point, the play has been a record of a tyrannical playwright's insistence upon his players responding instantaneously and unquestioningly to his prompts in order to avoid having their parts excised from the script. And Buckingham misses his cue on the line he's meant to recite about killing the kids: "Thus high, by thy

advice/And thy assistance, is King Richard seated;/But shall we wear these glories for a day?/Or shall they last, and we rejoice in them?" (*RIII* .4.2.3-6). Delaying only a second to contemplate the horrific enormity of the deed he's being asked to commit because he's either forgotten his line or is unable to deliver it, he doesn't realize that he's already Shakespeare's version of a "dead man walking." By the time Buckingham has summoned the courage to respond, this time asking Richard to confirm his promise of an estate and its lands for services rendered, he's flunked the audition. Richard can neither see nor hear Buckingham any longer, and, when he momentarily attracts Richard's attention, his response represents an assessment of the most extreme prejudice: "I am not in the giving vein to-day" (*RIII* 4.3.16).

The depth of Richard's evil has heretofore been softened and diffused both by the quality of his acting, invention, and the delight to be taken in removing from the play and pronouncing negative reviews on a group of moral equivocators. However, in 4.3, Richard loses the audience's approval and support by exulting in Tyrrel's story of how his henchmen have suffocated the two princes and what a horrible act he has presided over. What's responsible for that shift in our (and our students') affections?—Tyrrel is an experienced, professional, cynical hit man, unlike the earlier murderers that Richard has retained. And this dispassionate man delivers his story movingly:

> The tyrannous and bloody act is done,
> The most arch deed of piteous massacre
> That ever yet this land was guilty of.
> Dighton and Forrest, who I did suborn
> To do this piece of [ruthless] butchery,
> Albeit they were flesh'd villains, bloody dogs,
> Melted with tenderness and [kind] compassion,
> Wept like two children in their deaths' sad story.
> (*RIII* .4.3.1-8)

Shakespeare has deemed it important to shape an assess-

ment of not only the act but of the mind that calculated it. This is evil, pure and simple, against innocent victims. There's more than collateral damage at stake here. And this is a way of complicating the analysis of evil that involves so many in the world of the play.

So, then, is it all over for Richard, and should we then throw all of our support to the newly-arrived and soon-to-be Henry VII? Not on your life! Shakespeare's representation of young Richmond in a Guthrie production of the play a number of years ago was intentionally boring, wooden, clearly taking second place to Richard, even to the point of having to be pushed on stage on the back of a white wooden horse mounted on a platform. In terms of the lines that Shakespeare has equipped him with, he seems an entirely rhetorical presence, artfully political, without a compelling personality. The first time students encounter him in 5.2, they have two reactions: after a full dose of Richard for the entire play, Richmond pales in significance. It's hard to install such a late-comer to the festivities as the conquering hero of the play, particularly since his first speech seems so bland and conventional:

> Fellows in arms, and my most loving friends,
> Bruis'd underneath the yoke of tyranny,
> Thus far into the bowels of the land
> Have we march'd on without impediment;
> And here receive we from our father Stanley
> Lines of fair comfort and encouragement.
> The wretched, bloody, and usurping boar,
> That spoil'd your summer fields and fruitful vines,
> Swills your warm blood like wash and makes his trough
> In your embowell'd bosoms . . . (*RIII* .5.2.1-10)

A speech filled with rhetorical figures—formal and artful and, linguistically, dead on arrival. Whoever Richmond is, he doesn't appear to be in this speech. It's a political voice.

And the stage is set for a series of parallel comparisons

between Richmond and Richard in the "Ghost" scene that follows. In a play filled with spectacle and carefully staged performances, 5.3 is the most conventional one. Essentially, it's a medieval dream sequence, except that both Richmond and Richard are dreaming the same dreams and being spoken to by the many victims of Richard. They are now turned moral cheerleaders, enabling Richmond with their supernatural support to wake up refreshed and Richard, harangued and damned by the same chorus, to awaken in a fearful sweat. But, if we've been paying attention during a very long play, we've justifiably lost interest in these ghosts whose credibility as arbiters of good and bad has been severely bruised.

And, when Richard *does* wake up, he's much more complex than a mere Machiavel. His soliloquy draws us not only to the parallels *within* 5.3 but to Richard's initial soliloquy back in 1.1. Rather than dedicating himself to be what others have determined him to be, Richard has awakened to just a whiff of self-awareness, a commodity in very short supply in this play:

> What do I fear? Myself. There's none else by.
> Richard loves Richard; that is, I am I.
> Is there a murtherer here? No. Yes, I am.
> Then fly. What, from myself? Great reason
> why—
> Lest I revenge. What, myself upon myself?
> Alack, I love myself. Wherefore? For any good
> That I myself have done unto myself?
> Oh no! Alas, I rather hate myself
> For hateful deeds committed by myself.
> I am a villain; yet I lie, I am not.
> Fool, of thyself speak well; fool, do not flatter:
> My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,
> And every tongue brings in a several tale,
> And every tale condemns me for a villain. (*RIII*
> .5.3.182-95)

It's a scathing self-indictment, but it has to oc-

cur. And, since there's hardly a person in the play capable of delivering it for him without indicting himself, a realization of self must come from Richard. This is as open and as honest as he gets. If he has not changed (and I'm not convinced that he hasn't), he's grown in self-awareness.

Still, this soliloquy contains some very desperate stuff, perhaps suggesting that Richard is simply enacting the irremediable role of Devil that the ghosts have pronounced. And there's something to that, as seen in 5.4, when two more parallel comparisons are presented to the reader, this time rallying speeches delivered to the followers of each general just prior to the battle. Again, Richmond's speech strikes the politically obligatory tone that God is on their side; with divine sanction, "Then if you fight against God's enemy,/God will in justice ward you as his soldiers" (*RIII* .5.3.253-54). It's all about law and order. On Richard's side, the argument is singularly passionate and a-religious, filled with images of violence and chaos:

> If we be conquered, let men conquer us,
> And not these bastard Britains, whom our
> fathers
> Have in their own land beaten, bobb'd, and
> thump'd,
> And in record left them the heirs of shame.
> Shall these enjoy our lands? Lie with our
> wives?
> Ravish our daughters? Hark, I hear their drum.
> Fight, gentlemen of England! Fight, bold
> yeomen!
> Draw, archers, draw your arrows to the head!
> Spur your proud horses hard, and ride in blood;
> Amaze the welkin with your broken staves!
> (*RIII* .5.3.332-41)

If this were fifty years hence and Milton were handling this theme, I could well imagine a desperate Satan rallying his troops

on the field of heaven with similar language. But, whoever is speaking, the voice and the words are human and moving. And, in the final scene, when we hear Richard, committed to fighting to the very last breath, crying "A horse, a horse! My kingdom for a horse," it seems to matter little that he has no chance against the six versions of Richmond on the field that are stalking him (*RIII* 5.4.7). From what we've heard from Richmond, it seems a fairly easy impersonation. What we *are* moved by is that, to the very end, this is Richard's play, and, regardless of the assessments that Richmond has delivered against him in the final act and moments of the play, Richard's courage and (just as importantly) his charismatic theatrical presence sustains itself to the end.

You bet that this is a study of evil, but it's not enough to simply label and consign Richard to that role. That's already happened at the hands of some moral question marks and self-aggrandizers in the world of the play. If we can get our students to open up their own personal texts, contribute to the discovery of some historical texts contemporary with the action of the play, learn the conventions of revenge that Shakespeare is using and going beyond, and access some of the cultural texts that they operate in on a daily basis, we can make Shakespeare and Shakespeare's Richard live for and in them a little bit.

Notes

1. Thomas More, *The History of King Richard the Third* [unfinished],http://darkwin.uoregon.edu/%7ErBear/r3htlm. This text "was transcribed from W. E. Campbell's facsimile of the Rastell edition of 1557 by R. S. Bear at the University of Oregon, January-March 1997."

2. Students can find information on the Wars of the Roses and its related players and activities very easily. One useful web source is the "British History Online" site <http://www.british-history.ac.uk>, which has many useful links to information and maps (copywritten in 2003-05 by the University of London and History of Parliament Trust). Students need only to visit this site, enter "wars of the roses" in the "search" box, and track to the "later middle ages," where the information is located.

3. See the Richard III Society Home Page at http://www.richardiii.net/begin.htm.

4. Edward Surtz's "Introduction" to his edition of More's *Utopia* (New Haven: Yale UP), .xix "A remarkable feature of the frequent comic tone is not only that it helps to furnish relief. In almost every case it also emphasizes the thought and reinforces the emotional context."

5. See Denis Hay, "The Manuscript of Polydore Vergil's *Anglia Historia*, *ELH*" 54 (1939), 240-51. Polydore Vergil's text was ordered by Henry VII to be written and took the Italian cleric some twenty-six years to complete.

6. See Erasmus' *Praise of Folly* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979), 1-2. Erasmus says to More in his introduction: "'How did you ever get that idea [for the book's title]' you will say. First of all, it was suggested to me by your family name 'More' which comes as close to the Greek word for folly (Moria) as you yourself are far removed from the fact of folly, and everyone agrees you are far from it indeed."

7. See Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*, in *Christopher Marlowe: The Complete Plays of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. by J. B. Steane (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1972). Only a couple of years earlier, he'd seen a similar character in Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*, Barabas, steal the show. That character was at least as nasty as Richard—made just as much of a pariah by a hypocritical Christian Knights Templar society that justified its expropriation of Barabas' money earned from usurious money-lending on anti-semitic grounds. Those Christian acts of hypocrisy launched Barabas on a career of vengeful mayhem against his tormentors that thrills the audience with its evil creativity and secures its emotional support (mostly). Marlowe's play was a tremendous box office success—something that wouldn't have been lost on the financially astute Shakespeare.

8. Written and directed by Michael Moore, *Bowling for Columbine* (2002).

9. William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Richard III*, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. Evans et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), 708-64. All subsequent references to this play

will come from this text, indicated by *RIII*.

10. Jacques Lacan. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the 'I' as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" in *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1977), 1-7.

11. Richard III's character is identified as Gloucester in *The Riverside Shakespeare* edition of the play. For coherence, the character is referred to here as Richard.

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