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## Time and Talk in *Richard III*.iv

JEREMY LOPEZ

Clarence's murder is more important in Shakespeare than in Raphael Holinshed. Holinshed, like other historians of the period, focuses only on the detail of the malmsey butt: "finallie the duke was cast into the Tower, and therewith adiudged for a traitor, and priuillie drowned in a butt of malmsie."<sup>1</sup> As is not uncommon in Shakespeare, the amount of time given to the episode is inversely proportional to the amount of time given to it in the source. While the first three scenes of the play show Richard's plotting his brother's "accidental" execution, St. Thomas More's *History of Richard the Third*, in a passage that appears verbatim in the *Chronicles*, says only (in More's typically half-insinuating, understated way) that "[s]ome wise men also ween that his drift covertly conveyed, lacked not in helping forth his brother of Clarence to his death."<sup>2</sup> Further, the amount of time and words given to Clarence and his anonymous murderers is truly remarkable. In this play, execution is repeatedly and almost exclusively represented by ellipsis. Rivers, Grey, and Vaughan are carried "to death at Pomfret" in III.iii, but we do not see them die; Hastings is led off to be executed at the end of III.iv, and his head is brought in at III.v.21; Richard consults with Tyrrel about the young princes in IV.ii, and IV.iii begins with Tyrrel saying, "The tyrannous and bloody act is done"; and Buckingham is led off to execution in V.i. Besides Clarence's, the only other onstage death is Richard's.<sup>3</sup>

The scene stands out in other ways. It is the first scene in the play not to include Richard. It is the only scene in Q or F to contain prose. And it is remarkably inefficient. In contrast to the rapid and precise (if not always logical) action that precedes and follows it, this scene dwells on itself and toys with the audience's

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perception of time and of temporal verisimilitude. The audience is made to wait for something it knows will happen—the murder of Clarence—and it must work to see how that waiting is meaningful. The murderers do not enter until line 83 (line 77 in Q), and they are preceded by Clarence's lengthy explanation of his difficult night to a minor character. In F, Clarence is accompanied onstage by an anonymous Keeper. After Clarence falls asleep, Brakenbury enters to virtually no purpose—he makes a speech about sorrow and time—and leaves only twenty-two lines later when the murderers enter. Even in Q, which eliminates the Keeper and gives his lines to Brakenbury, the speech about sorrow and Brakenbury's exit seem abrupt.<sup>4</sup> Once the murderers have the stage to themselves with Clarence, they argue for fifty lines about whether or not they should wake their victim, and once he wakes up, they take another 105 lines to act. Even after the waiting is over, we do not get the outcome we expect. Historians of the period repeatedly say that Clarence was drowned in a butt of malmsey, but for all the effort Shakespeare puts into dramatizing the events around this detail, he has the drowning occur offstage *after* Clarence is stabbed.<sup>5</sup> The First Murderer drags his body offstage while the other stays and expresses feelings of guilt; the First Murderer must then return and upbraid his partner for being "slack" in helping him with the drowning—a drowning that is necessary in case the stabbing did not do the job (F, I.iv.259–60). Even the murderers' exit creates practical and interpretive difficulties: they must either exit separately, indicating that the Second Murderer is no longer involved, or together, in spite of the Second Murderer's indication that he is no longer involved.

The inefficiency of the scene's entrances, exits, and actions is similar and importantly related to the convoluted and inefficient way in which it represents time. The scene begins with Clarence's waking—"Oh, I have passed a miserable night"—but about only seventy lines later he is ready to sleep again (F, I.iv.2). Brakenbury's unexpected entrance and his musing that "Sorrow breaks seasons and reposing hours, / Makes the night morning and the noontide night" does not help to clarify matters (F, I.iv.76–7). Clarence's dream begins in the present ("Methoughts that I had broken from the Tower") but moves immediately to the past in an allusion to Clarence and Richard's boyhood journey to France ("And was embarked to cross to Burgundy") (F, I.iv.9, 10). A further temporal level opens up as Richard and Clarence are imagined reminiscing about "a thousand heavy times / During the wars of York and Lancaster / That had befall'n us" (F, I.iv.14–

6). The going gets rougher still as Clarence describes the imagined time of his dream:

Methought I had [time to gaze upon the secrets of the deep],  
 and 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 wandering air,  
 But smothered it within my panting bulk,  
 Who almost burst to belch it in the sea.  
 KEEPER. Awaked you not in this sore agony?  
 CLARENCE. No, no, my dream was lengthened after life.  
 Oh, then began the tempest to my soul.  
 I passed, methought, the melancholy flood,  
 With that sour ferryman which poets write of,  
 Unto the kingdom of perpetual night.

(F, I.iv.36–47)

Clarence's "then began the tempest to my soul" is temporally difficult because of the way it blurs the literal and figurative signals of the word "tempest" (F, I.iv.44). "Tempest to my soul" sounds like, and is, figurative language, but "tempest" in the context of the "tumbling billows of the main," the "dreadful noise of water," and the "fearful wracks" of the preceding speech bring out the literal connotations of the word (F, I.iv.20, 22, 24). "Then began," then, is strange because as a temporal marker it makes us look ahead to an action that is on the verge of happening, but we have just seen Clarence go through what might be described as a "tempest to my soul." "Then began" suggests forward movement, but keeps us standing still. We stay still until the ambiguous "flood" of line 45—extra ambiguous because of its echo of the literal "flood" at line 37—is clarified to be the River Styx. Line 44 means (partially figuratively, but not entirely, as we are still talking about water) "*then began the tempest to my soul.*" This spiritual torment is distinct from the (partially figurative) tempest that wracked his *body* in the previous lines. The levels of literal and figurative significance are still more difficult to sort out because what Clarence is recounting is a dream. The action of lines 36–47, and of the entire description of the dream, is similar to the action of the first half of the scene: in the speech, one event moves into another slowly, uncertainly, all the while retracing ground it has gone over, just as in the action, Clarence wakes from a dream, describes that dream and his waking from it, and goes to sleep again.

The Keeper wonders at lines 34–5, “Had you such leisure in the time of death / To gaze upon these secrets of the deep?” Here, the scene seems momentarily to concede the fact of its representational burden. The interpretive, theatrical significance of the events of the scene is largely unrelated to the temporal markers that order them. We understand Clarence’s dream, Brakenbury’s speech, and the argument between the murderers and Clarence as metaphors, as extratemporal encapsulations of certain meanings the play is concerned to convey: Clarence has a premonition of his fate and its appropriateness; Brakenbury, like the audience, is profoundly aware of the way in which natural, political, and temporal order are out of joint; the murderers are cowardly but perhaps no more cowardly than Clarence. Our understanding of these extratemporal meanings is characterized by the collision of each moment’s obvious extratemporality with its explicit concern with literal temporality—the bygone years of Clarence’s dream, the time of day or night, the need for haste in accomplishing the murder.

The disjuncture between theatrical significance and temporal verisimilitude that results from this collision is particularly important for this scene in this play because it is a history. Clarence begins the narrative of his dream with reference to a historical event—his trip to Burgundy—and the reference is dilated into a premonition of his own death. The reference to Burgundy creates the expectation of one kind of narrative time—the kind of time that we see in the play’s first scenes, where significance is determined by sequence. The details that turn the dream into a premonition create the expectation of another kind of narrative time—the kind of time in which sequence ironically is or is not the result of signals that foreshadow it. History plays, because they represent known history, always involve both kinds of time. Tragedy tends to involve only the latter. Historical tragedies, such as *Richard III*, manipulate an audience’s sense of the significance of “real time” by stretching out stage time to accommodate the ominous ironies characteristic of tragedy. *Richard III* I.iv does this particularly well because it is so insistent about the importance of the real time of the scene.

The anxiety an audience feels as the play violates the temporal verisimilitude it simultaneously insists upon is evident, and highly magnified, in editorial discussion of differences between the beginning of Clarence’s narrative in the two early versions of the play. While F’s version of Clarence’s narrative of his dream begins “Methoughts that I had broken from the Tower, / And was

embarked to cross to Burgundy” (I.iv.10–11), Q’s version begins without a reference to the Tower: simply, “Methoughts I was embarked for Burgundy” (I.iv.9–10, 9). John Jowett’s footnote says that “[t]he loss of narrative connection with Clarence’s present situation in Q1 makes the dream more dream-like and removed from time” (Q, p. 194n9). Antony Hammond’s note to the beginning of the dream speech in his Folio-based Arden edition says that “[t]he absence from Q of the information that Clarence, in his dream, was still aware of his incarceration is very hard to explain. His imprisonment clearly began Clarence’s mind on its journey towards an awareness of his own guilt . . . These two lines seem crucial to the development of the scene and Clarence’s state of mind: either an actor’s or a copyist’s oversight must be invoked to account for their omission from Q.”<sup>6</sup> Both observations seem quite overstated in their desire to differentiate Q and F. But the fact of the overstatement in each case bespeaks an anxiety about the temporal status of the dream and of its relationship to the rest of the scene—an anxiety that manifests itself in the desire either to show how the speech is supposed to be out of place, unattached, and removed, or to show how it is absolutely not. Jowett wants an unsettling mimesis—the dream is an extratemporal mirror of the coming action and so should be experienced *as* extratemporal—while Hammond wants naturalism—a *development* of action and “state of mind.” The scene does not allow for one *or* the other. Instead, the scene introduces two different ways of understanding time—stage time, historical time—and blurs them, just as it elides and blurs the distinctions between other crucial elements throughout: between sleeping and waking, pity and cruelty, human law and divine law, murderer and victim.

Things in this scene are constantly turning into other things. Before the murderers enter, we do not know whether this will be Clarence’s death scene or merely a foreshadowing of it. Once the murderers enter we do not know whether they are cowardly clowns, clownish philosophers, or merciless killers who simply enjoy drawing out their task.<sup>7</sup> The lame Gloucester of Clarence’s dream seems to stumble upon the “giddy footing of the hatches,” but the dramatic irony makes the stumble just as easily interpretable as an attack. Clarence’s act of rescue then seems to become an opportunity for Gloucester’s violence (F, I.iv.16–20). The same dramatic irony merges with or perhaps creates what seems to be Clarence’s, or Clarence’s dream’s, potential knowledge of things he cannot know. The “envious flood” of line 37

becomes the “melancholy flood” of line 45, and once Clarence awakes from his dream, he cannot “for a season” believe “but that I was in hell” (F, I.iv.61–2). In F Brakenbury enters, speaking lines that would be less unexpected from the Keeper, and lines that are concerned with the convergence of apparently separate things: night and day, “titles” and “low name” (I.iv.76–82).<sup>8</sup> When Clarence wakes, he calls immediately for a cup of wine. “You shall have wine enough, my lord, anon,” the Second Murderer says, signaling to the audience that he is thinking of an altogether different kind of “cup of wine” (F, I.iv.152). More subtly, the First Murderer’s line, “[Conscience is] even now at my elbow, persuading me not to / kill the duke,” alludes to the proverb, “the devil is at one’s elbow,” but puts conscience in the place of the devil—a confusion which is partly clarified by the Second Murderer’s “Take the devil in thy mind,” and partly exacerbated by his ambiguous pronouns (F, I.iv.138–9, 140–1). Throughout the dialogue the murderers and Clarence go over and over again problems that involve important but often impossible-to-make distinctions: the problem of killing Clarence in his sleep and his “waking” at the “great judgment day” to say “we stabbed him sleeping”; of having a “warrant” to kill Clarence, but no “warrant” to “defend” them from being “damned for killing him”; of the difference between “men” — royal and common — and between loyalty and royalty; of the difference between earthly kings and the divine King, earthly and divine law and retribution, beggars and princes (F, I.iv.100–3, 108–10, 154–6, 183–9, 194–208, 247–57). The characters constantly repeat each other’s words, each giving them his own nuance.

The murderers themselves are highly mutable, their separate and collective personalities merging into surprising new identities. With the fully alert Brakenbury, the murderers are brusque and confident, but once left alone with the sleeping Clarence they talk of cowardice and fear. Before Clarence wakes, the murderers repeatedly express imminent action—“Come, he dies,” “Come, shall we fall to work?,” “Strike!”—that is delayed by further discussion (F, I.iv.121, 144, 149). In F, Clarence finds that the First Murderer’s “voice is thunder, but thy looks are humble,” and that his “eyes do menace me,” but he looks “pale” (F, I.iv.157, 160). In Q, however, “Thy voice is thunder, but thy looks are humble” is addressed to the Second Executioner, and the line about looking pale is absent (Q, I.iv.151). The reason Clarence addresses different murderers in the different texts is that the F lines,

FIRST MURDERER. Soft, he wakes.

SECOND MURDERER. Strike!

FIRST MURDERER. No, we'll reason with him.

(F, I.iv.148–50)

are a separated version of what appears in Q as:

FIRST EXECUTIONER. Hark, he stirs. Shall I strike?

SECOND EXECUTIONER. No, first let's reason with him.

(Q, I.iv.145–6)

Here, Q presents perhaps a slightly more coherent picture of the murderers than F, in that the Second Murderer is the one who repents at the end of the scene in both texts. But at the same time, Q gives the stumbling hesitation “To, to, to—” in response to Clarence’s “wherefore come you hither?” to *both* executioners, while F gives it to the Second Murderer alone (Q, I.iv.155, 154). Similar to the intertextual confusion of Brakenbury and the Keeper, the conflation and separation of the murderers’ personalities within and between each text is symptomatic of the interpretive problems the texts themselves present. As we see perhaps most clearly when, at line 182 in F (line 174 in Q), the murderers begin to speak in vehement, rhetorical verse, there is very little hope of understanding the motivation or character of either or both murderers except from one moment to the next.

On the way through these moments to Clarence’s death, an audience gropes for concretely meaningful signals, for indications of the kind of scene this is and how to interpret it, both theatrically and morally. Theatrically, the time scheme is a mess, and the terms that define the experience of the scene are extremely fluid. Morally, it is more and more difficult to separate the good guys from the bad. An audience’s urge is to use the differences between the two murderers or between the murderers and Clarence to solve these interpretive problems. The latter helps explain how we should feel about what we are seeing—Clarence is worthy of pity, the murderers of terror—and the former helps explain our experience of the scene’s weirdly amorphous dilation—one of the murderers, penitent or fearful or both, is stalling. As to the distinction between the two murderers, Hammond’s footnote to the scene convincingly describes the way in which the scene refuses its audiences any interpretive comfort: “these minor figures have no ‘character’ in any consistent sense . . . [T]hey act according to the immediate dramatic needs of the moment.”<sup>9</sup>

Janis Lull and Jowett make evident in their notes the search for this comfort—the terrified groping for clarity of a perplexed audience. Lull’s note on the loss of synchrony in the murderers’ lines between Q and F, which begins at line 150, attempts to make an interpretive point about the difference between the two texts: “In F, the First Murderer appears to be the leader; he is tougher and pushier than his accomplice” (F, p. 92n150). This claim of course must almost immediately be revised: “Although the First Murderer seems to experience an attack of conscience at 138–44, he may just be testing the wavering resolve of his companion.” Jowett too wants consistency and seems to worry that Q, which omits the Second Murderer’s “Look behind you, my lord,” is straying too far from the path it seemed to be on (F, I.iv.258). He adds a bracketed stage direction, “To Second Executioner,” after the first line of Clarence’s speech beginning, “Not to relent is beastly, savage, devilish” (Q, I.iv.239–42). This stage direction attempts to compensate for the fact that, with First Executioner’s lines on either side of Clarence’s speech, Clarence seems to be spying pity in the looks of the executioner we have come to know as pitiless. These notes and emendations overemphasize both the difference between the two murderers and the difference between the two texts. Both texts present a scene in which it is difficult to tell at any given moment what one or the other murderer is up to, or how we are to think of them in relation to one another. The tension created by this difficulty finds release in the scene’s climactic violence. In their mirroring of one another, their parroting of one another’s and of Clarence’s words, their insistent repetition—to no purpose—of the word or idea of *conscience*, the two murderers resemble what Scott McMillin says of the identical masquers and second-masquers at the end of *The Revenger’s Tragedy*: “the revenger proliferates . . . and becomes many selves who are all one self, a violent self.”<sup>10</sup>

A good performance will never allow it to be entirely clear that one murderer is “pitiful” and the other “merciless”: the Second Murderer’s “Look behind you, my lord” might as well be a cruel joke as a warning. On a deeper and more unsettling level, the scene should go some way toward blurring the distinction on which it most importantly rests for its tragic effect: the distinction between Clarence and Richard. This happens first in the description of Clarence’s fall from the ship in his dream, where it is unclear whether he is attacked or brings his fall on himself; next when the murderers remind Clarence that he helped to kill Prince Edward; and later when Richard III, on the verge of getting

the justice (human or divine?) due him, is awakened by the ghosts of his past (F, I.iv.194–6). An audience's uncertainty over whether to like the murderers as clowns or fear them as assassins, or whether to pity Clarence as a victim or simply feel indifference toward him as another royal murderer, is vitally related to its uncertainty (shared by the Keeper in F) over whether to view Clarence's description of the dream as a theatrical necessity or mere theatricality. To the extent that he is made to seem like Richard, Clarence, too, becomes implicated in this violent self-proliferation. At the heart of the terror of the scene is the way in which the inevitability of its final action allows incidents and characters to be completely different in tone from one moment to the next. An audience responds to this unevenness by interpreting based upon what it knows will happen: Clarence will die. This knowledge provides the only secure position from which events can be judged and understood. Imminent violence helps to smooth the bumps raised by a dramaturgy that depends on dilation. Clarence's death is theatrically effective because we enjoy it when it happens; it is what we have been waiting for. Of course, violence is particularly imminent in this scene because the play is a history as well as a tragedy. The inevitability of its closure makes the freedom of the scene's form all the more harrowing. History is a nightmare from which Clarence is trying to wake.

Theatrical time on the Elizabethan stage would have always been exaggeratedly swift or exaggeratedly slow. The nonnaturalistic mode of the early modern theater is based on dilation and exposition: playwrights tend to fill the stage with words before action. Simple actions represented in this mode always seem to take a long time to occur. *Richard III* I.iv is a long scene and, because of the proportion of dilation to action, seems yet longer than it is. Complex series of actions, like the first three acts of *Richard III*, performed in this mode seem to happen very fast because it is hard for the audience to keep up with all the information being presented. One reason most of *Richard III* moves so quickly is that we do not have to watch anyone be killed between I.iv and V.v: we have to infer action from dialogue, and this keeps us feeling just half a step behind. The tension between difficult-to-follow, rapidly presented action and elaborately dilated, almost extratemporal set-pieces is a habit of early modern drama: think of the first three and a half acts of *Revenge's Tragedy* in contrast with the scene where the Duke is killed; or the first three scenes of *3 Henry VI* in contrast to the scene with York

on the molehill. The tension inherent in sequences like this erupts in *Richard III* in the shift between I.iii and I.iv. Wolfgang Clemen called I.iv “almost a tragedy in miniature with a dramatic curve complete in itself.”<sup>11</sup> This observation gets at the scene’s separateness from the rest of the play, but the word “miniature” seems inaccurate. This scene presents tragedy, as well as both the pleasures and difficulties of Elizabethan tragic dramaturgy, close up and highly magnified. The scene builds tension around the audience’s simultaneous sense of urgency and of leisure; of artificiality and the awareness of its impracticalities; of the construction of metaphors based in the action and metaphors that seem to govern the action. The resolution of this tension is sudden, inevitable, and absolute; the play harnesses the power of the audience’s potential impatience and incredulity and uses this power to detonate the explosion that is Clarence’s death.

The tensions of a scene such as *Richard III* I.iv do not always get resolved suddenly, absolutely, or violently. Inefficient scenes involving talkative murderers are in fact fairly common in Renaissance drama, though they never occur, as far as I can tell, in histories outside of *Richard III*.<sup>12</sup> Instead, they occur in tragedies. Like *Richard III* I.iv, these scenes rely on somewhat jarring dilation to create a sense of imminent violence. Unlike Shakespeare’s scene, they generally do so in service of underscoring or clarifying the difference between victim and murderer. As with Shakespeare’s scene, the strange temporality of talkative-murderer scenes in other plays is part of a shift in generic signals and expectations, but the shift is from tragic to comic rather than historic to tragic. An Elizabethan audience would have, I think, found *Richard III* I.iv a particularly gripping experience not only because of how the scene works in and of itself, but also because of the way in which it alludes to and thwarts the expectations created by other, similar scenes—scenes that almost always work themselves out in a comic, or at least a not-tragic, way.

The mysterious Messenger of *King Lear* is something of a cross between a traditional Ambidexter figure (such as Ambidexter in *Cambises*) and a Jacobean clown messenger (such as Dondolo in *The Revenger’s Tragedy*), and his eerie comic manner is out of place in the sternly officious world of Ragan and Gonorill. He appears in scene xii to take a message from Gonorill to Ragan and disappears at the end of scene xix—apparently in the play for no other reason than to fail at the one task he is meant to perform.<sup>13</sup> Asked whether he will have the heart to kill Lear should Ragan order it, the Messenger tells Gonorill that “Few words are

best in so small a matter . . . / . . . I will" (xii.112–3). But once he gets to Ragan's, even as he insists that he has a "heart compact of adamant," and that money "will make me do the deed," the play begins to stretch itself out somewhat in favor of talking over action (xv.53, 64).<sup>14</sup> Ragan tells the Messenger that he may be needed to "give a stab or two" in scene xv, but delays giving the order completely until scene xvii (xvii.52). When it comes time to do so, she "cannot utter it in words" because it is "such a thing as I do shame to speak" (xvii.16, 23). The Messenger must coax words from her:

MESSENGER. I'll speak it for thee, queen; shall I kill thy  
father?

I know 'tis that, and if it be so, say.

RAGAN. Aye.

MESSENGER. Why, that's enough.

RAGAN. And yet that is not all.

MESSENGER. What else?

RAGAN. Thou must kill that old man that came with him.

MESSENGER. Here are two hands; for each of them is one.  
(xvii.25–31)

Before the Messenger leaves, Ragan warns him not to relent should her father attempt to "speak fair" and plead for mercy (xix.51). Predictably, Leir and Perillus do attempt to speak fair, but their entreaties for mercy are not what deter the Messenger. What changes his mind is the clap of thunder that follows after he has sworn first by heaven and then hell to kill Leir, and Leir says, "Swear not by hell, for that stands gaping wide / To swallow thee and if thou do this deed" (xix.190–1). The Messenger begins to believe that the "old man is some strong magician," and while this is laughable, Leir must speak his lines with a kind of force—even if it is a comic force—that makes the thunder clap seem more than coincidental (xix.194).

And of course, the thunderclap is more than coincidental: it is overtly theatrical. It is a signal that Leir's words somehow still carry power—a signal that makes it possible (in a way that it never is in *King Lear*, where "Blow wind and crack your cheeks" does not precede but merely vies with the storm)<sup>15</sup> for the play to end with Leir thanking the heavens for his restoration and dismissing his two evil daughters with a damning parenthesis: "daughters did I say?" (xxix.173). At the end of the scene, when a second clap of thunder causes the Messenger to quake and let

fall his daggers once and for all, the Messenger enjoins his erstwhile victims, "If any ask you why the case so stands, / Say that your tongues were better than your hands" (xix.307–8). But this rings hollow: the Messenger has not even *not* killed Leir for the reasons he now puts forth. His delay in killing Leir upon seeing him asleep at the beginning of the scene, his ironic interpretations of Leir's fearful dream once Leir is awake, his flaunting the money Ragan gave him to do the deed all become interpretable as ways in which the Messenger is somehow always in awe of Leir's true majesty. The pressure his bizarre clowning exerts on the structure of the tragedy is dispersed into a more manageable energy once he leaves: the next time we see Leir, he and Perillus exchange clothes with some mariners, and in the following scene they meet Cordella while she is on a picnic with the King of Gallia, "disguised like country folk" (xxiv.17). The urgency of action characteristic of tragedies, which the Messenger and his employers have resisted in scenes xii through xvii, metamorphoses into a different kind of theatrical time altogether: the leisurely movement of pastoral comedy.

Like Clarence in *Richard III*, Leir and Perillus are asleep when their would-be assassin comes; so is Marius when Favorinus and Pausanius come with a Frenchman they have hired to kill him in Thomas Lodge's *The Wounds of Civil War*, and Pertillo when the two murderers his uncle has hired to kill him stop to argue about doing so in Robert Yarlington's *Two Lamentable Tragedies*.<sup>16</sup> When Caratach and his young nephew Hengo are first attacked by the Roman soldiers in John Fletcher's *Bonduca*, it is by the ineffectual "hungry courtier" Judas.<sup>17</sup> The circumstances in each case serve to make the aggressors look cowardly and the victims noble, and only in Shakespeare's play is the murder carried out more or less as planned. Lodge's Frenchman, whose heavily accented speech will come at the turn of the century to signal a common foppish parody of the court intriguer,<sup>18</sup> seems to see a heavenly vision that prevents him from killing Marius.<sup>19</sup> This is similar to the Messenger and the thunder in *Leir*, but Pedro's accent makes him a purely comic figure and, like Judas in the later *Bonduca*, probably just a coward. What is central in Lodge's scene is the apparent humanity of Favorinus and Pausanius, who suddenly see in Marius what, when the Frenchman saw it, we could not consider seriously: "Marius in his infancy / Was born to greater fortunes than we deem" (III.ii.100–1). This happens too at the end of *Bonduca*, when the Romans freely grant Caratach for his courage the mercy that Judas could not choose but grant earlier

(V.i.2570). The dilation of the comic-murderer scene creates an elaborately artificial or theatrical picture of cowardice that reveals a basic and real greatness that is then dramatically realized—even if this realization is, as in the case of Marius in *Wounds*, through a noble suicide.

The situation in *Two Lamentable Tragedies* is somewhat but not altogether different. The lengthy argument off to the side between the two murderers, the fact that they kill each other after the boy has been killed, and the fact that Murderer 1 (the evil one) uses his last bit of strength to stab Murderer 2 again work to make Pertillo seem all but incidental to the scene (E4v). The conflict between the two murderers takes on a structural significance that embodies the central idea of the play, and does so at the expense of the victim's humanity in a way that is characteristic of the play's overall project: the actor playing Pertillo in the Italian plot may also have played (and is in any case paralleled by) Beech's boy in the English plot, a character who spends most of the play half-alive with a hammer sticking in his head after Merry's botched murder attempt (C4v). Even more than Pertillo, Beech's boy is a silent emblem of violence and suffering, his horrible spectacle driving home the fact that some people never learn: just as Murderer 1 stabs Murderer 2 unnecessarily after his death, so Merry tries to silence Beech's boy after Beech's death, and will go on to cut Beech's body into pieces in an effort to get it safely hidden (E2v). While the dilation of the murder or postmurder scenes in Yarrington's play is not exactly comic (though it is absurd), it ultimately rests, as in the other scenes, on a clear distinction between killer and victim. The silence of the victim characters—dead, alive, or asleep—gives the sense that the two Murderers, or Merry and his wife, in their constant arguing, plotting, and justifying, are simply trying to fill a void.

The dilation of talkative murderer scenes in Elizabethan drama tends to suggest a movement away from or beyond violence. The inefficiency of such scenes tends to be resolved by means of a generic shift—tragedy becomes farce or pastoral—or through grotesque parody of tragic action itself—the extremity of Merry's actions comes back to haunt him in the form of the reassembled pieces of Beech's body. *Richard III* I.iv, however, provides the audience with no such opportunity for perspective, and that is why this scene is so extraordinary. In *Richard III* I.iv Clarence does nothing *but* demonstrate his nobility and humanity. Shakespeare goes out of his way to make Clarence sympathetic. As Edmond Malone points out, Clarence in I.iv speaks as though he has been

imprisoned without due process, but “the truth is, that he was tried and found guilty by his Peers, and a bill of attainder was afterwards passed against him.”<sup>20</sup> The Clarence of the stage struggles against the Clarence of history. And the Clarence of the stage believes himself to be on the verge of a breakthrough just before he dies:

My friend, I spy some pity in thy looks.  
 Oh, if thine eye be not a flatterer,  
 Come thou on my side and entreat for me;  
 A begging prince, what beggar pities not?

(F, I.iv.254–7)

The murderers will have none of this talk of honesty, this comforting beggar-prince equivocation. For perhaps the first and only time in the scene, everything is perfectly clear: the murderers at last do the job they were sent to do. History, comedy, and tragedy converge on the point of a knife. The scene has appeared as though it is about to open up some comic space within which Clarence has room to maneuver—and then that space is sealed off abruptly, making the lengthy and sympathetic expostulations of Clarence the foolish and ineffectual dilation of the scene.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Raphael Holinshed, *Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, ed. Henry Ellis, 6 vols. (London; 1587; rpt. J. Johnson, 1807–08), 3:712.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas More, *The History of Richard the Third and Selections from the English and Latin Poems*, ed. Richard Sylvester, Yale Edition of the Works of St. Thomas More, ed. Sylvester (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1976), p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Shakespeare, *King Richard III*, ed. Janis Lull, The New Cambridge Shakespeare, ed. Brian Gibbons (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999), III.iii.1, III.iv.78, IV.ii.73–83, IV.iii.1, V.i.1. Subsequent references will be to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text by line number and denoted with an “F.” Citations of Q will be taken from *The Tragedy of King Richard III*, ed. John Jowett, Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000). These references will also be cited parenthetically in the text by line number and will be denoted by a “Q.”

<sup>4</sup> This speech has tended to cause ripples in editions of the play. Antony Hammond's footnote in the Arden edition (London: Methuen, 1981) says that it is “odd . . . that this monologue should not be a soliloquy, and that Brakenbury should voice his suspicions with the Keeper for a witness” (p. 175n76). Brakenbury does not have an audience in Q. Jowett's edition, however, provides *three* footnotes on the speech—one on its resemblance to “the

eight-line *strambotto* form that Wyatt practised" (an observation he culls from Emrys Jones's *The Origins of Shakespeare* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977], p. 194); one on the passage's echoes of Job 17:11–2; and one on the syntax of the first line (p. 198nn69–76, 69–70, 69). Lull notes that the speech is similar to Henry V's "ceremony" soliloquy in *Henry V* IV.i.209–12 (p. 89n78–83). Wolfgang Clemen found this speech to be "the weakest part of the scene, lacking any real relation to the action or to the character who speaks it" (*A Commentary on Shakespeare's "Richard III,"* trans. Jean Bonheim [London: Methuen, 1968], p. 78). The eagerness of the three editors discussed here to place the speech within some kind of context would seem to indicate that audiences continue to feel what Clemen felt.

<sup>5</sup>The detail of the malmsey butt also appears in More, *History of Richard the Third*, p. 8; in Robert Fabyan's *New Chronicles of England and France in Two Parts* (1516; rpt. London, 1811), fol. 4Qv; Edward Hall's *Vnion of the Two Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre and York* (London, 1548), fol. 239v; and *Mirrou for Magistrates*, ed. Lily B. Campbell, Huntington Library Publications (1559; rpt. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1938), p. 219.

<sup>6</sup>Shakespeare, *King Richard III*, ed. Antony Hammond, Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare (London and New York: Methuen, 1981), p. 171n9–10.

<sup>7</sup>A production will of course have to make some kind of decision in this matter. But since the texts suggest with equal conviction each of the different possibilities at different times, the tension in the very act of making a production decision and thus potentially suppressing—not eliminating—certain possibilities will inevitably carry over onto the stage.

<sup>8</sup>Q does away with the Keeper and gives his lines to Brakenbury. Whatever the actual relationship is between these two texts, the slippage between Brakenbury and the Keeper is a good intertextual example of the conflation of separate things I am talking about.

<sup>9</sup>Shakespeare, *King Richard III*, ed. Antony Hammond, p. 177nn110–1.

<sup>10</sup>Scott McMillin, "Acting and Violence: *The Revenger's Tragedy* and Its Departures from *Hamlet*," *SEL* 24, 2 (Spring 1984): 275–91, 290.

<sup>11</sup>Clemen, p. 64.

<sup>12</sup>Thomas Heywood's *Edward IV*, for example, brings three quarreling, penitent murderers onstage after the murder of the young princes (T2) (*The First and Second Parts of King Edward IV. Histories by Thomas Heywood*, ed. Barron Field [London: Shakespeare Society, 1842], part 2, III.v).

<sup>13</sup>*A Critical Edition of the True Chronicle History of King Leir and His Three Daughters, Gonorill, Ragan, and Cordella*, ed. Donald M. Michie, Renaissance Imagination: Important Literary and Theatrical Texts from the Late Middle Ages through the Seventeenth Century, ed. Stephen Orgel (1605; New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1991), xii. 46. Subsequent references will be to this edition and will appear parenthetically by scene and line number.

<sup>14</sup>One might make the case that it has already done this stretching to some degree, in that Gonorill decides to leave it up to her sister to order Leir's death.

<sup>15</sup>Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Lear*, in *The Norton Shakespeare Based on the Oxford Edition*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Co., 1997), pp. 2307–2553, III.ii.1.

<sup>16</sup>Thomas Lodge, *The Wounds of Civil War*, ed. Joseph W. Houppert, Regents Renaissance Drama Series, ed. Cyrus Hoy (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1969), III.ii.58; Robert Yarington, *Two Lamentable Tragedies* (London, 1601), E4v. Subsequent references to these works will appear parenthetically in the text, Lodge by line number and Yarington by folio.

<sup>17</sup>John Fletcher, *Bonduca*, prepared by Walter Wilson Greg, vol. 85, Malone Society Reprints (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1951), I.ii.300. Subsequent references will be to this edition and will appear parenthetically in the text by act, scene, and line numbers.

<sup>18</sup>Especially in such plays as Henry Chettle's *The Tragedy of Hoffman* or the anonymous *Wisdom of Doctor Dodypoll*.

<sup>19</sup>"der be a great diable in ce eyes, qui dart de flame, and with de voice d'un bear, cries out, villain dare you kill Marius" (III.ii.86–8).

<sup>20</sup>Edmond Malone, quoted in Paul Werstine, "'Is It upon Record?': The Reduction of the History Play to History," in *New Ways of Looking at Old Texts, II*, ed. W. Speed Hill, Papers of the Renaissance English Text Society, 1992–1996 (Tempe: Renaissance English Text Society, 1998), pp. 71–82, 75.