THE GROTESQUE COMEDY OF *RICHARD III*

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

But why the comic at all in Shakespeare's Richard? It is true there are no scenes in the play one can call outright comedy. But there are many scenes that take on comic overtones because of the insight we have into Richard's intent and the resultant dramatic irony. Shakespeare chose to use the comic to emphasize the demonic in Richard.

The element of the grotesque in this play depends on irony, which Hardin Craig sees as operating at all levels.[1] The entire bloody career of Richard is ironic: it stopped the York succession, settled the family feud, and ended the hundred years of strife. Therefore, it is more than fitting that Shakespeare made effective use of irony in this play. The comedy and irony strengthen the drama and give reassurance of a happy ending. Since the Elizabethans knew that Richard would receive his just reward, they could enjoy what Brander Matthews calls the "sardonic humor" of the first three acts.[2] In his life Richard had been much like a character out of the old morality play, a figure who properly received his comedown at the end. Samuel Johnson saw in *Richard III* traces of the puppet plays in which the Devil was "lustily belaboured by old Vice."[3] The best recent treatment of Richard as a Vice character is that by Bernard Spivack. By "a characteristic medievalism," says

I am greatly indebted to Professor Roy W. Battenhouse of Indiana University for his valuable comments and criticism on the material in this essay.

[1] Hardin Craig, "Shakespeare and the History Play," *Joseph Quincy Adams Memorial Studies,* ed. James G. McManaway (Washington: The Folger Shakespeare Library, 1948), p. 62.

[2] Brander Matthews, *Shakespere as a Playwright* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), p. 100.

[3] Samuel Johnson, "General Observations on the Plays of Shakespeare," *Works,* ed. Robert Lynan (London: Cowie, 1925), V, 157.

Spivack, "destructive forces were always dramatized as grotesque or ludicrous figures."[4] To him Richard is the Vice Deceit, who seeks "the appreciation of the audience for his dexterity."

In an excellent chapter on "Gothic Drama" A. P. Rossiter constantly shows the parallel treatment of the grotesquely comic and the sacred in Gothic art. In the works of Grunewald, Bosch, and Breugel, he notes, there is a reflection of the same medieval aspect of life as seen in the cycle plays and other forms of drama.[5] I should like to suggest that it would be rewarding to picture Richard as a Gothic gargoyle, comic in his grotesqueness, diabolic in his leer, reminding one of hell. He poses as a Christian, prayer book in hand, between two bishops, as he plans the slaughter of innocents. He is a complete inversion of Christian discipleship. It is only by a Providence of which he has no comprehension, and quite beside his intent, that even this apostate can serve as an instrument of divine vengeance, a scourge of God to rid England of her sin. Irony becomes a necessity, for we must know the intent of Richard while those about him do not. His wit is needed to fulfill his purpose, but when that has fulfilled the limited role allowed it by Providence, his wit is shown to be myopic and inadequate. Therefore, when England has been properly scourged, his wit fails him, and he falls prey to Richmond, who arrives to right the state.

Richard is neither the tragic hero of classical stature nor completely static, for he undergoes a noticeable change when he drops his twisted comedy.[6] He develops from a confident doer of evil to a confused and unsuccessful Machiavel without hope. That he is conscious himself of this development I hope to show in an analysis of the play.

I particularly agree with Louis Cazamian that Richard is a conscious actor—we know from his soliloquies that he is "clearly conscious of his inner being."[7] Still why the need for the comic in such a portrayal? What appears to have been missed in the various commentaries, although one or two have hinted at it, is that Richard finds a perverse happiness in his diabolic scheming. There is little humor in the early soliloquy of *III Henry VI* and in the opening soliloquy of *Richard III;* instead, there are present the

[4]Bernard Spivack, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil: The History of a Metaphor in Relation to His Major Villains* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), p. 58.

[5]A. P. Rossiter, *English Drama from Early Times to the Elizabethans: Its Background, Origins and Development* (London: Hutchinson & Co., Ltd., 1950), pp. 62-75.

[6]Muriel C. Bradbrook, *Shakespeare and Elizabethan Poetry: A Study of His Earlier Works in Relation to the Poetry of the Time* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 134.

[7]Louis F. Cazamian, *The Development of English Humor* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1952), pp. 199-200.

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

Up to this moment he is happy as he successfully makes one move after the other. Acting the role is pleasant: he puns more than any other character in the play.[8] He cannot refrain from using double meanings that show his confidence and that congratulate himself on his own brilliance. The beauty of it is that we appreciate his accomplishment and are compelled to admire him even though the role he plays and the action it occasions are destructive. Shakespeare, however, removes any guilt we may feel in finding Richard sympathetic by presenting a different man in the final two acts. The irony in such a performance is almost unlimited, as it works on such a multiplicity of levels that it even includes the audience in the irony of being caught as both victor and victim in the same game Richard plays.

The wordplay of the opening soliloquy gives a hint (I.i.1-41).[9] "This sun of York" is often seen as a triple pun on Edward IV as the son of York with a sun on his badge and as the brightest sun of the party in power. I suggest further wordplay in its being reflexive--that is, in also standing for Richard himself. Then *his* "winter of discontent" is over, and he will commence *his* glorious summer. Such a reading gives the subtle meaning of dissembling: he will show a merry front to the world that at the moment dances to "delightful measures." We are prepared for the role he will play before he openly informs us of it. He will make his own world and laws. Therefore, his mode of comedy will not be that of others, and we can accept it as comedy on those grounds. When Clarence arrives on the scene, Richard commands his thoughts to dive down to his soul. From this moment forward, we know his soul to be unlike any other encountered in the play.

[8]Molly Maureen Mahood, *Shakespeare's Wordplay* (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1957), p. 167.

[9]*The Complete Works*, ed. G. B. Harrison (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1952). All further line references will be to this edition.

The opening scene shows the inverted world of Richard in action. Clarence is on his way to the Tower; Lord Hastings has just been released. Both men speak their troubled minds to the man who ironically will have them destroyed in the Tower. Within ten lines of his decisive soliloquy Richard is already playing his hellish game and thoroughly enjoying the position he maintains. He says to Clarence, "Oh, belike His Majesty hath some intent / That you shall be new-christened in the Tower" (I.i.49-50), which is an excellent example of what Wolfgang Clemen was referring to when he spoke of the dramatic irony helping to "build up this dense tissue of foreboding hints."[10] Further, it reassures the reader or spectator that Richard is in earnest in the role he has created, and that he is eager to plunge into it. He immediately implants in Clarence's mind the idea that it is the queen, and not the king, who has caused his arrest and the imprisonment of Lord Hastings. Then he cannot resist applauding himself for his cleverness. He adds, "We are not safe, Clarence, we are not safe" (I.i.70). Who cannot be fascinated with such a mind?

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

The following scene has occasioned more comment than any other in the play, for in it Shakespeare has stretched probability to its furthest limits. His own invention,[11] the Richard-Anne wooing scene, has often been criticized for its artificiality. The scene can be found justifiable on the grounds that it furthers the characterization of Richard, showing the lengths to which he will go in order to obtain his aims. Shakespeare realized we had to put up with this fellow until we had him seated on the throne in order for the play to sustain interest. A cold-blooded approach to the throne, with no humor in Richard's character and, as a result, less interest, would have repeated the pattern of so many of the contemporary history plays. If Richard as a hero-villian could be made a fascinating one, what better characterization than to place him in a ludicrous situation which he could master with his particular bent of wit? Ignoring the conventional garden setting for courtly

[10]Wolfgang H. Clemen, "Anticipation and Foreboding in Shakespeare's Early Histories," *Shakespeare Survey 6* (1953), p. 29.

[11]Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), III, 236, states the scene was possibly suggested by the wooing scenes in Thomas Legge's *Richardus Tertius* or Jasper Heywood's translation of Seneca's *Hercules Furens*.

wooing.[12] Shakespeare brilliantly uses Richard's role of inversion. He has the monstrous Richard propose to Anne over the coffin of her father-in-law who has been slain by his hand.

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

Ritual, or not, the scene stands on its own merits in the overall structure of the play. Richard's qualities of deception, persuasion, and daring break forth. As if he were making a test run for his later great experiment on the court, he here moves carefully, calculates the counter-move of his opponent, and moves again. Where most suitors would have shrugged and laughed off defeat, Richard in full confidence continues his "attack," coming in from this side and that until Anne accepts the ring.

A point often overlooked in this famous scene is that Anne does not completely reverse her position. She accepts the ring with the statement "To take is not to give" (I.ii.203). The "boon" he requests of her after this line is to allow him to see to the burial of Henry VI, and this she agrees to, thankful that he has become so penitent. He then requests she bid him farewell, and her reply is guarded:

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

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

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

[12] C. R. Baskervill, "Some Evidence for Early Romantic Plays in England," *Modern Philology*, XIV (December, 1916), 469, discusses the use of gardens and arbors as conventional love settings.

Was ever woman in this humor wooed?
Was ever woman in this humor won?
I'll have her, but I will not keep her long.

(I.ii.228-30)

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

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

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

(I.iii.47-50)

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

Q. Margaret. Thou loathèd issue of thy father's loins!
Thou rag of honor! Thou detested—
Gloucester. Margaret.
Q. Margaret. Richard!
Gloucester. Ha!
Q. Margaret. I call thee not.
Gloucester. I cry thee mercy, then, for I had thought
That thou hadst called me all these bitter names.
Q. Margaret. Why, so I did, but looked for no reply.
Oh, let me make the period to my curse!

(I.iii.232-38)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Christian references which set *Richard III* somewhat apart from the *Henry VI* trilogy continue in the next act. Edward opens the first scene as a "peacemaker," who having done a "good day's work" (II.i.1) is ready to meet his Redeemer. But although his actions have produced outward unity, the "peace" he has created is not much different from that which Richard approves and preaches. He has "set [his] friends at peace on earth" (II.i.6), and Clarence has drowned in a butt of malmsey wine. His request that the court not "dissemble" (8) ironically recalls Richard's more outrageous preaching and mockery of spiritual values.

Richard arrives on the reconciliation scene in full command of his role:

I do not know that Englishman alive
With whom my soul is any jot at odds
More than the infant that is born tonight.
I thank my God for my humility.

(II.i.69-72)

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

Act III concentrates on Richard's quick moves to attain the throne after the death of Edward IV. In seven fast-moving scenes which reflect the swiftness of the thought that lies behind the action, the young princes are secured in the Tower, Lord Hastings is executed, and Richard is requested to take the throne. Richard relies on only one man, and that man is Buckingham, who according to the chronicles was not as eager as he appears in Shakespeare's play to be involved with Richard's schemes.[13]

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

No doubt, no doubt. Oh, 'tis a parlous boy—
Bold, quick, ingenious, forward, capable.
He is all the mother's from the top to toe.

(III.i.154-56)

[13]Raphael Holinshed, *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (London: J. Johnson *et. al.*, 1808), III, 378.

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

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

But Richard must resort to an obvious lie when he shows his withered arm, which all present know to have been a disfigurement from birth, and declares it to be the result of the witchcraft of Queen Elizabeth and Jane Shore.[14] Since Shakespeare chose to present the historical scene as it was represented in the chronicles, he also had to make the decision to show Richard as being reduced to theatrics and open falsehood to gain his ends. The diabolic figure of brilliant wit of the opening scenes of the play has given way to a ruthless monster, confident in his ability to make his victims accept his pretenses, however illogical. He now dares to say:

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

The strawberry incident in this scene also contains comic irony. Edward Dowden remarks on the cynical humor throughout this conference, mainly in the manner in which Ely's strawberries are reserved until the head of Hastings is off.[15] Charles Forker speaks of Richard's "little reign of terror" in the scene and the contrast between the emblematic goodness of the garden and the withered arm of Richard.[16] Again we have inverted value in that Richard will not partake of the garden until Hastings is executed.

Two rascals—one a master and the other his disciple—produce the humor of the remainder of the act as they play together the game of double meanings, mock innocence, and false piety. As with the capers of Volpone and his servant Mosca, the comedy consists in the outrageously successful gulling of dupes. The play of deceit is introduced by Buckingham, who like

[14]The incident is presented by Shakespeare much in the same manner he receives it from the chronicles. Holinshed, *Chronicles*, III, 380-81, has almost the exact scene, including the line "And also, no man was there present, but well knew that his arme was euer such since his birth."

[15]Edward Dowden, *Shakespere: A Critical Study of His Mind and Art* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1948), p. 186.

[16]Charles R. Forker, "Shakespeare's Chronicle Plays as Historical-Pastoral," *Shakespeare Studies*, I (1965), 98.

Mosca has learned well from his master. Richard's failure to comprehend fully his lesson could be ominous for him, for when Richard next tries to manipulate Buckingham, the servant is shrewd enough to know when to stop.

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

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

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

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

In comparing the speeches of Buckingham and Richard, one can see that the wit of the latter far exceeds that of the former. Buckingham's lines sound prepared, rehearsed, and ritualistic. Richard's lines are studiously spontaneous, flexible, and loaded with comic overtones. He is the comedian of the first act again, as he wins the crown. When Buckingham, in the name of England, offers him the throne, Richard is ostensibly the wooed instead of the wooer. Playing the "maid's part" (III.vii.51) as instructed by Buckingham, he gives over thirty lines of humble reasons why he cannot entertain such a thought. But in his humility he manages to produce three valid reasons why he both stays to listen to the argument and why he cannot accept the crown.[17] He brings up the obstacle of the princes and their royal line before Buckingham does. When the charge of bastardy removes this obstacle, there is nothing for him to do as a devout and humble leader of his people but accept the crown.

[17]See Holinshed, *Chronicles*, III, 395-96, for a rather cynical comment upon Richard's "singular dissimulation" in this matter.

The opening scene of Act IV initiates the action that results in the destruction of Richard. Lord Stanley comes to fetch Anne for the coronation, and Queen Elizabeth sends Dorset to Richmond.[18] The next scene presents the changed Richard. It is almost a shock to find his wit overshadowed by his insecurity and his lack of humor. He is directly involved as an open participant in the reality of the court and can no longer remain hidden behind his brilliant cleverness. The first indication of this remarkable change is seen during his attempts to enlist Buckingham's aid in the murder of the princes. His innuendoes no longer carry effectiveness; he must speak openly. Shocked, Buckingham leaves the presence of the king but returns later to request the Earldom of Hereford promised to him earlier. The king repeatedly ignores the request and finally snaps, "I am not in the giving vein today" (IV.ii.119). Comedy occurs in a Machiavel's petulance exposing his true feelings. How foolish to act in anger. It forewarns Buckingham, who fearfully leaves the court. The Machiavel has blindly endangered himself.

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

> A flourish, trumpets! Strike alarum, drums!
> Let not the Heavens hear these telltale women
> Rail on the Lord's anointed. Strike, I say!
>
> (IV.iv.148-50)

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

The direct coaxing of Elizabeth by Richard is not historical fact,[19] although Holinshed has a thorough discussion of how Richard's messengers, "being men both of wit and grauitie, so persuaded the queene with great and pregnant reasons, & what with faire and large promises, that she began somewhat to relent," and finally to give in to Richard's wish that she allow her five daughters to leave sanctuary and be placed in the custody of the "rauenous woolfe."[20] However, not only the public but the young lady herself so loathed the idea of her marriage to the king, that even with Anne

[18]Richard G. Moulton, *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist: A Popular Illustration of the Principles of Scientific Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906) p. 120, sees this as the turning point of the play. From now on Richard is on the defensive.

[19]Her attitude in the scene has been prepared for earlier. See IV.i.64-65 in which she tells Anne she wishes her no harm for what she has done in letting Richard woo and win her.

[20]Holinshed, *Chronicles*, III, 429.

out of the way, the historical Richard postponed his courtship until "he were in more quietnesse" (*Chronicles*, III.431).

Why does Shakespeare invent an incident and present it at some length? He gives it more than two hundred lines,[21] some forty more than he gave to the earlier wooing of Anne. It is my opinion that he wished to balance the presentation of his characterization of Richard; that is, whereas he first convinced us of the powers of this monstrous comedian, he now wishes to destroy that image in order that the entire concept of Richard's character can be shattered on Bosworth Field without regret on the part of the spectator. The qualities we found fascinating in Richard, his brilliant wit, his corrupt sense of humor, his ability to stand outside the scene and watch himself, are missing in his encounter with Queen Elizabeth, and we are in this manner prepared for the concluding act of the play.

Early in his confrontation with Queen Elizabeth it is she who takes over the lead from Richard, and it is in her lines we find double meanings (IV.iv.216-34). A few speeches more and we find that she has got to the heart of the matter; she recognizes that his soul is of another world (IV.iv.256-60). It is now Richard who is befuddled. He says, "Be not so hasty to confound my meaning," and later, "Come, come, you mock me. This is not the way / To win your daughter" (IV.iv.261, 284-85). At this point the dialogue reverts to Senecan stichomythia. We have a lecture on the religion of Richard revealed through Queen Elizabeth's questions and parries, until the moment arrives where she takes over Richard's lines and completes them in the masterful manner in which he completed those of Queen Margaret in Act I:

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

It is the comedy of a Machiavel who has been overmatched—and by a woman.

[21] Stopford Augustus Brooke, *On Ten Plays of Shakespeare* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1905), p. 113, lists this as one of the weak scenes in the play because of its length.

His deterioration of wit is seen sharply in the remainder of the scene:

K. Richard. Some light-foot friend post to the Duke of Norfolk—
Ratcliff, thyself, or Catesby—where is he?
Catesby. Here, my lord.
K. Richard. Fly to the Duke. [*To* Ratcliff] Post thou to Salisbury.
When thou comest thither—[*To* Catesby] Dull unmindful villain,
Why stand'st thou still, and go'st not to the Duke?
Catesby. First, mighty sovereign, let me know your mind.
What from your Grace I shall deliver to him.
K. Richard. O true, good Catesby, bid him levy straight.
The greatest strength and power he can make,
And meet me presently at Salisbury.

(IV.iv.440-50)

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

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

In general the comedy of *Richard III* is different from that in the *Henry VI* trilogy where several characters were given comical treatments in various degrees. In *Richard III* the comedy is centered around the murderous king. Forker remarks that Richard "turns the acquisition of power into a monstrous private joke,"[22] and the enormity of the act in its macabre nature may have attracted Shakespeare to focus his growing ability with comedy on the one man. The comedy supports and furthers his dramatic themes dealing with

[22]Forker, "Shakespeare's Chronicle Plays as Historical-Pastoral," 87.

weakness in high places and the dangers to the state which result, and as the dramatist developed in his handling of the English history play genre, he obviously became more adept at using comic elements to enrich his work. He dared to portray his most wicked king as his most comic king.