HONEYED TOADS:

Sinister Aesthetics in Shakespeare's *Richard III*

By Joel Elliot Slotkin

ABSTRACT

Critics of Shakespeare's Richard III *have had difficulty explaining and validating the perennial engagement of theater audiences with Richard, a figure who violates the norms of morality and aesthetics by triumphantly asserting his own malevolence and taking narcissistic pride in his ugliness. This article analyzes Richard's problematic appeal by focusing on the play's use of "sinister aesthetics": in other words, a set of cultural conventions governing the representation of evil, which valorize the dark and hideous as admirable poetic subjects and, by association, risk encouraging the very values they label as evil. The play thereby affirms a poetics in which Richard is attractive and powerful because he is evil—and even because he is ugly. This analytical approach enables us to appreciate the full range of moral and aesthetic appeals available to Shakespeare and his audiences. It also elucidates the complex play of conflicting moral and aesthetic ideas that gives* Richard III *its poetic energy. Richard combines two sets of sinister conventions, a poetics of malevolent theatricality and a poetics of deformity, which the play uses to explore the tension between aesthetics and ethics that plagued Renaissance moralists. As a critical concept, sinister aesthetics can be applied more broadly to facilitate the analysis of artistic representations whose appeal runs counter to normative aesthetic standards.*

1. INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM OF RICHARD

The fascination with evil is central to the construction of Shakespeare's Richard III. According to Antony Hammond, editor of the Arden *Richard III*, no other example of what he calls the "criminal hero. . . . has had the theatrical longevity, nor the audience appeal of Richard; never have the elements

described above been combined into so persuasive and attractive a consequence as Richard III" (104). Although audiences from Shakespeare's time to the present have taken pleasure in Richard's compelling malevolence, the implications of Richard's appeal continue to trouble critics. A. P. Rossiter, while acknowledging that Richard's asides make it impossible for him to deceive the audience, suggests that audiences cooperate in deceiving themselves when they do not take Richard seriously, with potentially dangerous moral consequences. Hugh Richmond, in his introduction to the 1999 collection *Critical Essays on Shakespeare's* Richard III, sees the "compulsive interest" of modern audiences in "the megalomaniac delights of Richard's sadism" as symptomatic of a pervasive mental pathology, "an epidemic obsession with violent assertion of the male self" (7–8). Such responses reflect the tendency of critics, from the early modern period to the present, to attribute the appeal of representations of evil either to the deceptiveness of the representation or to a flaw in the audience's moral or psychological character. Although these claims make sense within the critics' respective ideological frameworks, they demonize or pathologize the affective responses that, for centuries, audiences have had to the play.[1]

To better account for these responses, I will approach the play, and the problems it raises, by recognizing that it is first and foremost an aesthetic construction, and therefore designed to give pleasure. Aesthetic conventions are socially constructed and historically specific sets of rules. They provide the framework in which psychological states are expressed, and they shape the forms in which desire manifests itself. Before we conclude that a given work or audience response evinces moral depravity or psychological disorder, we need to consider the operative conventions and beliefs that shaped the aesthetic choices of writers like Shakespeare and the aesthetic responses of their audiences. The advantage of this approach is that it grounds the analysis in an appreciation of the full range of moral and aesthetic appeals available to Shakespeare and his audiences. It also allows us to see more clearly the complex play of conflicting moral and aesthetic ideas that gives *Richard III* its poetic energy. I will argue here that the play encourages audiences to appreciate Richard because of his evil, not in spite of it, and that this response to a literary representation is not inherently pathological or corrupt. Rather, it is shaped by a "sinister aesthetic" that governs the play's representations of evil and ugliness, and that calls into question the moral and psychological boundaries separating us from evil and self-destructiveness.

Richard III treats the appeal of evil in two ways: as a problem of knowledge

and a problem of desire. Richard's character symbolizes in paradoxical form Renaissance debates about the epistemological value of appearances for determining moral truths. In his deformity, which the other characters take as a sign of his hellish nature, Richard epitomizes the union of outer appearances and inner truths. At the same time, Richard's theatrical pretense of benevolence emblematizes the deceitful disjunction between external shows and internal nature. The characters who discuss Richard assume that recognizing Richard's evil would evoke disgust and horror and a corresponding desire to resist his machinations—an assumption that many Renaissance theorists would have shared. However, the play undermines this assumption by portraying characters who knowingly choose the evil and ugly over the good and beautiful.

Beneath the question of how to recognize evil, then, lies the difficulty of explaining some of the human responses to it. Shakespeare examines this issue from different angles throughout his work; for example, his sonnets to the so-called dark lady explore the speaker's erotic obsession with a morally and aesthetically repugnant object. As Joel Fineman observes, "Acknowledging the doubly disgusting nature of the lady—that she is black, that she is false—we therefore ask, along with the poet, what . . . makes the lover . . . 'love what others [including the lover himself] do abhor'" (56). *Richard III* demands that we ask such questions about Richard in his relationship to other characters and the audience. The play depicts characters—including both Richard and his victims—who at crucial moments are motivated by a desire for what they recognize as evil (and ugly). The characters cannot rationally account for this desire; indeed, their moral and aesthetic theories preclude the possibility of its existence. They therefore tend to treat the engagement with evil as a form of *perversity*; that is, a logically inexplicable defiance of a set of values or truths assumed to be self-evidently correct.[2] But in Anne's response to Richard's seduction, and in Richard's half-mocking narcissism, the play presents an alternative poetics in which Richard is attractive *because* he is evil—and even because he is ugly. The play treats its evil and horrible elements as aesthetic objects capable of arousing erotic desire.

To properly understand how evil can appeal in this way, we need to take account of the distinctive power of the aesthetic conventions governing representations of evil. These conventions, which I call "sinister aesthetics," do not merely appropriate pleasurable representational techniques for depicting beauty and virtue (hereafter "normative aesthetics"), nor do they violate those conventions simply to disgust readers with ugliness. Modern scholars often approach the appeal of evil or the monstrous as just such a category

violation; for example, Fineman, in seeking an explanation for the appeal of the dark lady, argues, "She is not a negative version of, nor is she an alternative to, conventional sonneteering ideals. Instead, being dark and (so it seems) being a lady, she is specifically and constitutively presented as the perversion of any such idealization, not simply the lowest rung on the ladder of love, but a power that kicks the ladder out altogether" (58–59). For many critics, our engagement with these category violations reveals a fundamental human impulse toward rebellion against rules and order. Without denying the potential validity of such claims, framing the issue in terms of sinister aesthetics allows a focus on what Linda Charnes calls "the structural operations of transgression" (47). Sinister aesthetics are the structures that allow violations of the normative to be represented in art, to be categorized, and to become part of the literary tradition. Their particulars may depend on historical and cultural circumstances, but as a class they precede the early modern period and persist today. They valorize the dark and hideous as admirable poetic subjects—and, by association, risk encouraging the very values they label as evil.[3]

Richard combines two important sets of sinister conventions: a poetics of malevolent theatricality and a poetics of deformity. The play uses these conventions to engage with the contradictory theories about the relationship between aesthetics and ethics that plagued Renaissance theorists, such as Sidney. Richard seduces his most important victims not by successful deception, as many critics assume, but rather by an artful yet transparent gesturing at deception. These "palpable devices" (3.6.11) allow the characters a complex, self-conscious engagement with Richard.[4] At the same time, Richard becomes the focus for an aesthetics of deformity, in which his own misshapen body and the mangled bodies of his victims become erotic objects and theatrical spectacles.

2. ELF-MARKS AND VIRTUOUS VISORS: EPISTEMOLOGY IN *RICHARD III*

The responses of various characters within the play to Richard's sinister theatricality and deformity provide models for the potential responses of audiences watching the play. One after another, the characters assert the impossibility of succumbing to Richard's transparent blandishments; yet each in turn submits to him. These contradictory reactions mirror the uncertainty of Renaissance poets and literary theorists about the proper relationship between aesthetic pleasure and morally didactic power in poetry. *Richard III*

thereby dramatizes the paradoxes inherent in Renaissance theories about the relationship between aesthetics and ethics.

Sidney's "Defence of Poesy," probably the most famous Elizabethan discussion of these issues, incorporates two contradictory frameworks for understanding the relationship between aesthetics and ethics: a Platonic conception of beauty as an expression of the pleasure inherent in goodness and an Aristotelian belief in a pleasure inherent in all skillful representations. In the Platonic view, the notion of attractive evil is virtually oxymoronic—an honest and competent artistic representation of evil will naturally be ugly, and this ugliness will naturally be unpleasant. If the representation of evil in poetry produces a moral benefit, then it must do so by functioning as a kind of aversion therapy. As Sidney puts it, "If the poet do his part aright, he will show you in Tantalus, Atreus, and such like, nothing that is not to be shunned" (224). For evil to appeal to the reader it must be hidden behind or combined with something beautiful or good—unless the reader's "infected will" perversely loves what is naturally loathsome (217). At the opposite pole lies the Aristotelian claim that any well-executed artistic representation can be pleasurable, even an accurate representation of a hideous object like a corpse: ". . . as Aristotle saith, those things which in themselves are horrible, as cruel battles, unnatural monsters, are made in poetical imitation delightful" (227).[5]

Thus, the "Defence of Poesy" describes the beauty of poetry alternately as a mask and a manifestation of moral truths. When Sidney calls poetry the "skin" and "beauty" of Plato's work, and philosophy the "inside and strength" (213), he assumes that the poetic qualities of a text present a fair outside that covers—but is organically related to—the truths presented in the text. Later he argues that this poetic exterior serves primarily to keep the audience's attention: ". . . neither philosopher nor historiographer could at the first have entered into the gates of popular judgements, if they had not taken a great passport of poetry" (214). Finally, the poetic skin becomes an instrument of deceit: "For even those hard-hearted evil men . . . will be content to be delighted . . . and so steal to see the form of goodness (which seen they cannot but love) ere themselves be aware, as if they took a medicine of cherries" (227). This progression of metaphors reveals a gradual alienation of poetic form from content. In the end, poetry is a beautiful shell that conceals the bitter pill of ethical instruction. The sweetness of poetic beauty is directly opposed to the bitter taste of truth.

At the same time, however, the instrument of deception is an instrument of vision. As an analogy for poetic representation, Sidney describes a hypothetical

painting of Lucretia not as a picture of a pretty face that will lure the reader into contemplating her virtue, but rather as "the outward beauty of such a virtue" (218). In this Platonic view, the beauty of the painted face incarnates the inward virtue rather than standing in opposition to it. Furthermore, it is the most direct expression of virtue that we can access; that is why Sidney holds poetry superior to philosophy or history alone. It is this belief in the inherent beauty of expressed virtue that informs the parenthetical comment, "which seen they cannot but love," quoted above. The assumption that viewing goodness must inspire love stands in contrast to the surrounding metaphor of goodness as a bitter medicine that must be covered up with cherry flavoring.

The problem with the Platonic view is that it allows a poem's moral agenda to preclude the possibility of incompatible aesthetic effects. The Aristotelian model, more subtly limiting, suggests that the pleasure produced by evil representations is the same as that produced by any skillful representation. By divorcing the moral qualities of a representation from the aesthetic response to it, this paradigm encourages critics to pit poetic and moral elements against each other and to debate their relative importance.[6]

In *Richard III*, the character of Richard serves as a nexus for the dramatization of these conflicting ideas. He not only alludes to both theories repeatedly in the course of his manipulations, he also embodies with equal force both the connection and the disjunction of appearance and virtue. His ugliness is an aesthetic attribute that symbolizes his evil, but at the same time, Richard artfully crafts false appearances of goodness.[7] On the one hand, characters in *Richard III* often assert or imply a Platonic correspondence between evil and ugliness. Margaret takes Richard's deformed back and limbs as signs of his evil nature: "Thou elvish-marked, abortive rooting-hog,/ Thou that wast sealed in thy nativity/ The slave of nature and the son of hell" (1.3.225–27). Hell, having selected Richard at birth for evil, marked him with the stamp of deformity as an outward sign of his twisted soul.[8] On the other hand, the play also paradoxically presents Richard as the character whose outer appearance least reflects his inner, moral nature. Just as Margaret makes him a virtual symbol of Platonic correspondences in act 1, the Duchess sees him as an emblem of the lack of such correspondences: "O that deceit should steal such gentle shapes,/ And with a virtuous visor hide [deepe vice]!" (2.2.26–27).[9] The figurative visor, like a literal mask, is an artistic construct crafted to produce a pleasing fiction. Its aesthetic nature appears most clearly in Richard's appearance "between two bishops" (3.7.89.2), which is basically a pretty picture

purporting to represent an act of piety. Richard, of course, glories in his ability to cloak vice with the appearance of virtue: "And thus I clothe my naked villainy/ With old odd ends stol'n out of holy writ,/ And seem a saint when most I play the devil" (1.3.336–38). Again, the semblance of virtue is treated as clothing, as a deceptive adornment.

In short, *Richard III* presents an intense double perspective on the nature of seeming, exploring the close ties between evil and the aesthetic by juxtaposing the deformed appearance that reveals the demonic with the benevolent mask that conceals it. The other characters repeatedly draw attention to whether or not Richard's appearance matches his nature. Richard himself spends a lot of time claiming that he is what he seems (for example, at 1.3.47–53), boasting that he is not, and accusing other characters of such deceits (as in 3.1.9–14). Whether Richard actually is or is not what he seems depends on which aspect of his seeming a character or an audience member considers. Seeming, therefore, fluctuates in diagnostic value throughout the play. Similarly, Richard's natural ugliness and his artificial virtue are each treated as the prime characteristic of his evil at different times. Though one is real and one false, both are varieties of seeming—and the construction and evaluation of semblances is the domain of aesthetics.

3. PALPABLE DEVICES AND THE APPEAL OF EVIL

Aesthetic evaluation differs meaningfully from other forms of epistemological inquiry, not because of the nature of the objects to which it is traditionally applied, but because it involves an affective response.[10] In the discourse of Richard and the other characters, theatricality and deformity are the subject for epistemological debates; in the development of the dramatic action, theatricality and deformity become sources of erotic attraction. Richard uses his two contradictory modes of seeming—alternately displaying his virtuous visor and his deep vice—to generate two different kinds of appeal.

Many characters in the play—especially Clarence, Hastings, and King Edward—find Richard appealing to the extent that they are taken in by his "gentle shapes" (2.2.27). For them, his appeal derives from the view of aesthetics as deceptive covering, and it can usually be explained as a normative, though shortsighted, response to that covering. When such characters discover Richard's vice or pay attention to his physical appearance, they are usually repulsed. Although the success of Richard's deceit is important, critics tend to focus too narrowly on it. Rossiter, for instance, asserts that Richard

achieves "the complete dissimulation of everything that might betray him"; in effect, he says that Richard has a false saintly outside that completely covers his true demonic inside (140). Tellingly, Rossiter takes his two first and strongest pieces of support from Richard's boasting soliloquy in *3 Henry VI* (3.2), lines that Colley Cibber added to *Richard III* in the 1700s and that too many interpreters since then have treated as part of the play.

This conflation blurs an important shift in emphasis between *3 Henry VI* and *Richard III*, from a Richard who can deceive his victims perfectly to a Richard who makes his evil apparent in the most dramatically significant of his so-called deceptions, a Richard who attracts his victims through his evil and thereby implicates them in it.[11] Although the characters who see Richard's evil and yield to him anyway are in the minority, they are presented in far greater detail, because their response is far more central to the point of the drama. The play explicitly asserts the transparency of Richard's deceptions in a passage that R. Chris Hassel rightly seeks to rescue from obscurity (80). The Scrivener, having just copied the indictment of Lord Hastings laments: "Why, who's so gross/ That cannot see this palpable device?/ Yet who's so bold but says he sees it not?" (3.6.10–12). The "palpable device," the deception that advertises its deceptiveness but works anyway, is a primary feature of Richard's seductiveness in the play, beginning with his wooing of Anne. In fact, the Scrivener's commentary is analogous to Richard's speech at the end of 1.2, translated from the erotic to the political sphere.[12]

Richard III's focus on this baffling acquiescence to a known evil is reinforced by Richard's shift away from a readily comprehensible, though strikingly intense, desire for the crown and toward a general desire for villainy itself. It is the Richard of *3 Henry VI* who says "I'll make my heaven to dream upon the crown" (3.2.168). The Richard of *Richard III* says instead that "I am determinèd to prove a villain" (1.1.30) and spends surprisingly little time discussing his royal ambitions.[13] He no longer seeks an idealized heaven, not even a figurative one; he merely wants "the world . . . to bustle in" (1.1.151).

The two scenes in which Richard woos Anne and Elizabeth are therefore centrally important because they show characters who are not themselves villainous engaging directly with this desire for evil. In the first wooing scene (1.2), Anne tries continually, but unconvincingly, to display normative responses. Her initial rejection of Richard displays appropriate disgust with his evil and ugliness, and when she is close to succumbing, she indicates a normative attraction to loving speeches and a concern that they should be sincere: "I would I knew thy heart" (1.2.178). Even after she has supposedly realized her

mistake, she still claims that she "Grossly grew captive to his honey words" (4.1.75), that the normative beauty of Richard's poetry somehow blinded her to his heretofore obvious faults. But as Richard gleefully points out, it strains credulity to think that Anne could forget by the end of the wooing scene the qualities that initially repulsed her. He therefore proposes that Anne sees his evil and knowingly chooses it. Like Anne, Elizabeth does not act out of ignorance; she offers her daughter to Richard while fully aware of his evil. In the earlier part of the play, Elizabeth notes Richard's "interior hatred,/ Which in your outward actions shows itself" (1.3.65–66). Although she is nonetheless naïve enough to imagine that Edward can "remove" the source of Richard's "ill will" (1.3.69), she realizes her mistake by 2.4, when she seeks sanctuary. In the second wooing scene itself (4.4), Richard provides her with continuous reminders of his crimes, even making a veiled threat to kill Elizabeth's daughter if she will not bolster his claim to the throne: "Her life is only safest in her birth" (4.4.203).

Even if it were correct, the argument that Anne and Elizabeth are deceived by Richard's "dissembling looks" (1.2.222) could not transfer to the audience of the play. Any explanation of Richard's appeal to us must account for the constant visibility of his evil. Richard's murderous acts surround and interpenetrate the wooing scenes—especially in the more successful first wooing scene, which leaves no space for a sustained expression of an aesthetic untainted by evil. Anne's seduction takes place over Henry's coffin, Richard continually refers to his slaying of Henry and Edward in his wooing speeches, and soliloquies in which Richard states his malevolent intentions bracket the scene. Moreover, the audience has the constant reminder of Richard's deformities visible on stage. Richard's evil does not merely inflect Anne's response, it defines it.

Although relatively little information now survives about how Shakespeare's audiences reacted to *Richard III* when it was originally performed, the title page for the First Quarto (1597) strongly suggests that the interest of the play for an Elizabethan audience lies in its display of evil. It describes the play as "The Tragedy of King Richard the Third. Containing his treacherous Plots against his brother Clarence: the pittiefull murther of his innocent nephewes: his tyrannicall usurpation: with the whole course of his detested life, and most deserved death." This description, which would have been used to advertise the Quarto,[14] focuses almost exclusively on Richard's malice and makes no attempt to highlight admirable, conventionally pleasant, or virtuous elements in the play. Unlike the *Mirror for Magistrates*, one of Shakespeare's sources,

Richard III puts no emphasis on the tragic pathos of noble characters falling from greatness, and the advertisement reflects this. It emphasizes that Richard utterly lacks nobility of character, and it mentions his fall almost perfunctorily. Furthermore, it presents no alternative heroes, tragic or otherwise. Although the advertisement is well seasoned with moralizing adjectives, it does not identify any meaningful moral lessons in the play. Instead, it defines the play as a combination of treacherous plotting, pitiful murder, tyrannical usurpation, and the account of a detested life, and these elements were evidently considered the most effective inducement for people to buy the Quarto. If the advertisement is designed to point out the enjoyable features of *Richard III*, then it is deliberately offering as pleasurable the elements in Richard that make him evil, not the elements that make him potentially great or morally instructive.

4. PLAYING THE DEVIL: THE THEATRICALITY OF EVIL

Why does Richard choose villainy seemingly for its own sake? Why does Anne recognize Richard's evil and yet succumb to his seduction? Why would Elizabethan audiences flock to see the account of a "detested life"? Although *Richard III* asserts the fundamental mysteriousness of the impulse toward evil, it also provides many examples of how evil can be attractive when seen from the perspective of a sinister aesthetics. Richard artfully constructs appearances that the play encourages other characters (and the audience) to evaluate aesthetically. Many critics have noted that Richard's self-conscious theatricality is central to his character and to his appeal.[15] By referring to himself as a Vice (3.1.82), by staging his appearance "between two bishops" (3.7.89.2), by continually pretending to be what he is not to other characters, and by speaking directly to the audience in asides, Richard demonstrates the artful nature of his character. Richard's claim that he seems a saint when most he plays the devil is telling in this regard. Other characters tend to describe Richard in terms of a dichotomy between outer aesthetic appearance and inner moral identity, between seeming and being. Richard revises this expected antithesis so that seeming is instead opposed to playing, as if he recognizes no essential identity in himself apart from performance.[16] Elizabeth adopts a similar view of Richard when she implies that if he could "put on some other shape," he would "not be Richard" and not be guilty of Richard's crimes (4.4.262–63).

As his use of the two bishops suggests, Richard not only plays various roles, he also coaches and orchestrates others to create dramatic scenes. In the

wooing scene, he manipulates Anne, not merely by projecting a false image of himself, but in part by simply telling her what to do—and his instructions always show an awareness of the dramatic effects produced by the situations he arranges. For instance, after a bout of stichomythia, he instructs Anne "To leave this keen encounter of our wits/ And fall somewhat into a slower method" (1.2.113–14). Richard not only identifies the exchange as a deliberately constructed display of wit—"method" here suggesting a rhetorical design[17]—he makes a conscious decision to alter the method. Since Richard speaks here only of the form of their exchange, rather than the content, his concerns appear to be theatrically motivated and designed for the audience's benefit. Similarly, when he offers Anne his sword, he instructs her: "Nay, do not pause, 'twas I that killed your husband" (1.2.165). In effect, Richard places himself in the role of a senior actor instructing a junior one: he tells Anne to perform a murder scene, and he emphasizes his pedagogical role by giving an otherwise superfluous explanation of her motivation in the proposed scene.[18] Since it is not Anne's idea to grab his sword, Richard probably must help her with her blocking as well, putting the sword in her hand and perhaps even positioning it against his chest. If, as Stephen Orgel and Scott McMillin have argued, the relationship between a master actor and a boy actor frequently involved a sexual component, then Richard's evocation of this relationship might aid his seduction by placing Anne (who would in fact be played by a boy actor) in an erotically submissive position.[19] But more importantly, Richard shapes the scene to produce an ironic effect that only he and the audience are capable of appreciating: the spectacle of a villain who has mesmerized his victim so completely that he can provide her with the means to defeat him, and urge her to do so, knowing that she will not listen.

Like Iago and other villains of Renaissance drama, Richard is an artist who designs his creations explicitly to please the audience as well as to manipulate the other characters. Thus, Phyllis Rackin rightly notes that while Richard seduces Anne, he simultaneously "performs a similar seduction upon the audience" (41). By focusing on the process of Richard constructing his lies, the play invites the audience to evaluate the quality of his constructions based on an understanding of the goals and conventions—the aesthetic—under which he operates. But Richard's acting is not merely a case of good or morally neutral art used for evil purposes; rather, the actor's art is fundamentally linked to evil in the world of the play. The play obsessively defines goodness as men being what they seem and evil as the creation of false appearances. The emphasis on devils and the Vice as roles that are played rather than as actual

beings also suggests that theatricality and evil help to constitute each other in the world of the play.

Richard's wooing of Anne demonstrates the inextricability of his artfulness and his evil, or as Rackin puts it, "The association between the transgressive, the demonic, and the theatrical [that] is consistently used to characterize Richard" (40). But the analyses of Rackin and other critics tend to become limiting when they address the nature and consequences of this link. For example, Rackin argues, "For the audience as for Anne, the seduction requires the suspension of moral judgment and the erasure of historical memory"(41–42). In fact, Richard reminds Anne and the audience of his past crimes at every opportunity.

Richard's seduction is not a beautiful example of courtly love poetry that just happens to be insincere. Richard refers to his crimes so frequently that the poetry of his seduction could not be reassigned to a virtuous character. His seemingly inept declarations of innocence (see 87; 89–90), which he makes no attempt to defend, can only serve to flaunt his guilt and his compulsive dishonesty. His darker impulses continually break the flow of Petrarchan phrases: "Your beauty, which did haunt me in my sleep/ To undertake the death of all the world/ So I might rest one hour in your sweet bosom" (1.2.120–22). These lines rely for their effect on the contrast between Anne's "sweet bosom" and Richard's demonic pursuit of universal destruction. The only passage longer than three or four lines that might work in purely Petrarchan terms is Richard's speech at 149–64, which climaxes in his offering Anne the sword—but even here, one would need to cut the actual climax of the speech, where he reminds her that he killed Henry and Edward.[20] Furthermore, at least from the audience's perspective, the reference to Anne's "revengeful heart" would become a mere cliché, a rhetorical hyperbole elevating some trivial wrong between lovers to a grandiose level of importance, rather than what it is: a grotesque species of understatement, where Richard attempts to fit his truly monstrous crimes into a rhetoric that is not serious enough to hold them.[21]

Remembering Richard's evil, then, is not only easy, it also allows the audience to experience a much darker and richer poetic effect than forgetting would. According to Rackin, *Richard III* exemplifies the Renaissance view of tragedy as "directed toward their [the audience's] feminine sympathies, softening hard hearts, piercing guilty souls with remorse, ravishing the entire audience with the feminine passions of pity and fear, and forcing them to weep" (35). Similarly, Marguerite Waller argues that Richard's character is

fundamentally "sentimental" (162). Although sentimentality is indeed part of the distinctive emotional tone of *Richard III*, it is not what Richard offers Anne—and the audience—in the first wooing scene. It is not merely that Shakespeare strews reminders of Richard's evil about the scene like caltrops, but that Richard forces Anne to confront his murders as part of the rhetorical strategy of his seduction. This sinister rhetoric produces an appeal that has little to do with the "womanly emotions" (33) excited by tragedy in Rackin's account, and everything to do with the apprehension and memory of evil. For Anne, the dissonance between Richard's brutality and his artificial veneer of lovesick vulnerability provides the ultimate temptation. Her resistance begins to weaken exactly when Richard juxtaposes the two in the most direct fashion possible: "'twas I that killed King Henry;/ But 'twas thy heavenly face that set me on" (167–68).[22] These are the so-called "honey words" (4.1.75) that prompt Anne to drop the sword. Lest we miss the point, a few lines later, Richard makes a similar juxtaposition: "That hand which for thy love did kill thy love/ Shall for thy love kill a far truer love./ To both their deaths shalt thou be accessary," eliciting Anne's "I would I knew thy heart" (1.2.175–78), which is her real moment of surrender, the moment when she becomes more interested in a living Richard than a dead one.

Anne is indeed seduced by Richard's deceptive language, but not because she takes his speeches at face value or forgets the crimes of which Richard takes such pains to remind her. She correctly identifies him as a "dissembler" (170), an estimate that she never explicitly revises. The witty turn where Anne becomes an accessory to murder should be a significant move in the seduction narrative that Richard's persona as lover is constructing. If, as Donna Oestreich-Hart suggests, Anne has "bought into" the fallacious logic of Richard's courtly love rhetoric (255), we would expect Anne to take Richard's conceit seriously in this crucial moment of surrender. Instead, her response looks past the mock accusation, treating it as a rhetorical flourish that does not reveal Richard's heart. Unfortunately for her, this understanding does not protect her from Richard's allure. If anything, her discovery of his capacity for theatrical deception seems to tantalize her, arousing her desire to uncover the mystery of Richard's heart, which is the beginning of her desire for him. For Anne, erotic attraction is generated by the sinister—in this case, by the dark, ironic beauty of Richard's carefully constructed self-presentation as a creature of deceptive malevolence. The power of the scene for the audience lies partly in those same juxtapositions that conquer Anne, the glimpse of malice only perfunctorily veiled with the mask of a lover. It is this paradoxically self-

revealing disguise, this palpable device, that helps to define Richard's identity and to produce his appeal.

5. DESCANTING ON DEFORMITY

Richard III, then, presents a sinister version of theatricality as artful, deceitful malice. Inasmuch as Richard's personality can be said to have a true inside, it is characterized by this sinister theatricality. However, the play also treats Richard's outside, his deformity, as a source of sinister pleasure. The primary exponent of this idea is, of course, Richard himself. His movement toward a narcissistic erotics of deformity begins with moral perversity, which then becomes aestheticized. Furthermore, Richard is not the only one who enjoys contemplating deformity. Richard's power to seduce Anne, Elizabeth, and even the audience suggests that the play develops a more pervasive erotics of deformity that is enhanced by its association with evil.

Richard III begins to explore an aesthetics of deformity in its opening soliloquy:

> Why, I in this weak-piping time of peace
> Have no delight to pass away the time,
> Unless to spy my shadow in the sun
> And descant on mine own deformity. (1.1.24–27)

Here, Richard proposes to us the possibility of a poetry about ugliness as the only thing other than villainy that might bring him delight. Because Richard shows little delight in his deformed appearance at this point, it is tempting to dismiss this line as a witty but insignificant bit of sarcasm. However, an aestheticized and eroticized deformity becomes crucially important as the play progresses. Through Anne's attraction to the deformed Richard, Richard's narcissistic regard of his own deformities, and the presentation of bodies deformed by Richard's butchery as artistic objects,[23] the play explores the moral danger and poetic potential of this sinister aesthetic.

The connection between deformed limbs and erotic appeal is not a Shakespearean innovation—in fact, it is literally proverbial in the Renaissance. Erasmus lists among his *Adages* the maxim "Claudus optime virum agit," which R. A. B. Mynors translates as "The lame man makes the best lecher" (2.9.49).[24] Erasmus cites the biological explanation given in Aristotle's *Problemata*, that the lame are "salacior" because their genitals receive some of the nutrition intended for their legs. The proverb and the explanation suggest both that the lame have greater desires and that they provide greater satisfaction; that is, they

are more desirable as sexual objects. Montaigne notes the same proverb in his essay "Des boiteux," but in his characteristic spirit of modern scientific inquiry, he claims to have tested its validity himself: "Car par la seule autorité de l'usage ancien et public de ce mot, je me suis autrefois fait accroire avoir reçu plus de plaisir d'une femme, de ce qu'elle n'était pas droite, et mis cela en recette de ses grâces" ("For, by the onely authoritie of the antient and publike use of this word or phrase, I have heretofore perswaded my selfe, to have received more pleasure of a Woman, in that she was not straight, and have accompted hir crookednesse in the number of her graces" [381; 288]). Montaigne here treats erotic desire as aesthetically mediated: placing a physical characteristic in the category of "grâces" is, in essence, an aesthetic judgment. Before his experiment, Montaigne proposes a theory based on an aesthetics of novelty: "le mouvement détraqué de la boiteuse apportât quelque nouveau plaisir à la besogne" ("the loose or disjoynted motion of a limping or crooke-backt Woman, might adde some new kinde of pleasure unto that businesse or sweet sinne" [380; 287]). This pleasure in the sensual novelty of ungraceful motions suggests the possibility of a distinctive aesthetics of deformity. Although Montaigne rejects the idea that deformity is *inherently* beautiful, his revised theory argues for the importance of social conventions—"l'usage ancien et public"—in generating aesthetic pleasure, and thereby erotic pleasure. Moreover, he asserts the existence of conventions, and their corresponding pleasures, that defy more normative conventions of the beautiful.[25]

The presence of deformity brings similar aesthetic alternatives to the forefront in *Richard III*, especially in the wooing of Anne and its immediate aftermath. Modern critics have been relatively slow to acknowledge these factors: "Although critics diverge in their views of the courtship . . . most tend to fall into one of two camps. Either they find it unbelievable that Anne capitulates, or they see Richard's 'genius' and his success as a function of rhetorical skill" (Charnes 38). Although the implausibility of Anne's reaction and the rhetorical skill of Richard are crucial features of the scene, these formulations in themselves misrepresent the seduction, which is not primarily about the persuasive effects of acting. Nor is it a scene of proto-modern psychological realism.[26]

Instead, the interplay of moral and aesthetic perversity governs the development of the drama in 1.2, as Richard demonstrates in his speech after wooing Anne:

> Was ever woman in this humour wooed?
> Was ever woman in this humour won?
> . . . . . .

> To take her in her heart's extremest hate,
> With curses in her mouth, tears in her eyes,
> The bleeding witness of her hatred by,
> Having God, her conscience, and these bars against me,
> And I nothing to back my suit at all
> But the plain devil and dissembling looks,
> And yet to win her, all the world to nothing? (1.2.213–23)

In this passage, Richard, surprisingly, refrains from boastfully comparing himself to Proteus or a chameleon. For the remainder of the scene, Richard's compulsive acting is simply an attribute that allows him to condemn (by playing the moralist) and then enact (by playing the fop) the aesthetic perversity he claims to find in Anne. Apart from the ambiguous phrase "dissembling looks," he makes no reference to his skills at all. Instead Richard emphasizes the improbability of his success, mentioning odds twice ("all the world to nothing" and "My dukedom to a beggarly denier" [236]) and enumerating the reasons why his attempt should have failed, taking pains to demonstrate that his evil should have been readily apparent to Anne.

The apparent implausibility of Anne's capitulation strikes many audiences as a flaw in the play, but Richard's emphasis on its implausibility strongly suggests that it is the main point of the scene. As Charnes puts it, "It is precisely its preposterousness that renders the scene dramatically successful, erotically convincing, and centrally revealing of the rest of the play's social and libidinal relations" (38). For Richard, the fact that he has succeeded in spite of normative expectations is a primary source of the pleasure he feels in his triumph—and with his rhetorical questions and conspiratorial manner, he invites the audience to share this sense of pleasurable wonder at Anne's willingness to "debase her eyes" (231). Since Richard's dissembling looks are more of a rhetorical conceit than a functional deception at this point, we must conclude that Anne falls undeceived, as it were.

Like the Vice who preaches against the sins he embodies, Richard both condemns and gradually enacts Anne's perversity, emphasizing both its moral and aesthetic components.[27] He castigates her for choosing his evil and deformity over Edward's beauty and virtue. At the same time, he revels in his own misdeeds, his murder of Edward, and his deception of Anne. His achievements are all the more impressive, he suggests, because of his undeniable ugliness. Richard's double moral consciousness, which is intelligible mainly through the tradition of the morality play, is partially stabilized in this dramatic context by his adherence to normative aesthetic standards.

Richard's speech progresses from moral perversity (the love of villainy) to a sinister aesthetic sensibility (the love of deformity) that he conceives of as aesthetic perversity. The gradual nature of this aesthetic shift and the fact that it occurs well after Richard's moral self-positioning suggest that it may be harder for audiences to accept and to share imaginatively than Richard's commitment to evil. First, Richard stops marveling that Anne could love her husband's murderer and begins to marvel that Anne could find him handsome despite his deformed physique. Then, he decides that Anne loves him *because* of his appearance, although he remains conscious of his own ugliness: "Upon my life, she finds, although I cannot/ Myself to be a marv'lous proper man" (1.2.238–39). But somewhere in between calling himself a proper man and, in the next line, announcing his intention to buy a looking glass, Richard begins to see his body as an aesthetic object, something to admire and to adorn with clothing. The word "adorn" can suggest a deceptive beauty covering ugliness, and the context certainly raises that connotation to prominence. But this implication is an unintentional—or quickly abandoned—irony on Richard's part. Richard, by the end of the passage, sees himself aesthetically and therefore wishes the clothing to complement or enhance his deformed body, not to conceal it. The last lines clearly demonstrate his eagerness to view himself, first through his shadow and then in a glass, even before he entertains scores of tailors.[28]

Anne's attraction to Richard, and even Richard's self-love, are merely extreme versions of a response that the play evokes in its audience, what Charnes calls the "fascination that always underlies revulsion" (38). That the character of Richard would have some degree of erotic attraction even for Elizabethan audiences is supported by John Manningham's famous diary entry (1602), which provides a contemporary acknowledgment of Richard's appeal as "a jolly thriving wooer" (4.3.43). Manningham's anecdote may not be literally true, but it suggests the kind of responses to Richard that were available in the Renaissance: "Upon a tyme when Burbidge played Rich. 3. there was a citizen greue soe farr in liking with him, that before shee went from the play shee appointed him to come that night unto hir by the name of Ri: the 3" (Hammond 67). The account is interesting because Manningham gives no hint that he finds the nameless citizen's sexual attraction to Richard III particularly noteworthy in itself. On the contrary, it is merely the setup for a joke whose punch line is that Shakespeare preempts Burbage under the name of William the Conqueror. The sex appeal of an actor playing Richard seems therefore to be a plausible, perhaps even commonplace, element of the Elizabethan theatrical experience.

The only reason that the audience's enjoyment of Richard is more

plausible or morally defensible than Anne's is that, for the audience, he is merely a fictional character. Anne's love for Richard invites the condemnation of the audience because he has murdered her family, and his marriage to her empowers him to commit further murders. Richard Burbage as Richard of Gloucester has not actually killed anyone, but he exerts an erotic attraction through the appearance of evil and deformity, that is, through the conventions of sinister aesthetics.

Richard's movement from a consciousness capable of condemning Anne as perverse to an artfully assumed set of alternate aesthetic standards provides a model for the audience's experience of sinister aesthetics. The play does not require its audience to permanently or totally abandon normative conceptions of beauty and an awareness of what people are supposed to like. Instead, it allows the audience to *entertain* these other aesthetic values without having to explicitly acknowledge them, much as Montaigne derives erotic pleasure from the aesthetics of deformity in practice while debunking it in his subsequent analysis. To descant on deformity as Richard does runs the risk of sounding grotesque unless we are clearly being sarcastic; that is, unless it is a palpable device. Our appreciation for Richard is just like Richard's narcissism (and akin to Montaigne's account of his amorous experiment): self-conscious, playful, and ostensibly insincere, belying what is in fact a significant and powerful impulse.

6. THE NEST OF SPICERY AND THE LIMITS OF SEDUCTION

Just as Richard's theatrically evil power begins with a wooing scene, so it is climaxed by one: his attempt in 4.4 to seduce Elizabeth into giving him her daughter's hand in marriage.[29] In both scenes, Richard convinces a woman whose loved ones he has murdered to agree to a marriage with him. But seducing a prospective bride through an intermediary proves more difficult for Richard, and this difficulty reveals the disjunction between the theory and practice of the appeal of evil in the play. The Folio version further highlights this issue by having Richard repeat in compressed form the argument that defeats Anne—"Say that I did all this for love of her" (M.1, after 4.4.263)—only to receive an immediate rejection from Elizabeth: "Nay then indeed she cannot choose but hate thee" (M.2). This gambit succeeds with Anne, when Richard actually performs it, but when he describes it hypothetically to Elizabeth, she cannot conceive of any response besides antipathy. Elizabeth can and will duplicate Anne's surrender, but she cannot acknowledge it or incorporate it into a theory of human action. Indeed, no character in the play, not even Richard,

can explain how Richard succeeds.[30] By seeing the choice to love Richard as perverse, the characters accept a conceptual framework within which the choice cannot be explained, a conceptual framework that they share not only with Renaissance poetic theorists, but also with many modern critics.

This scene also entangles the erotic and political spheres even more explicitly than the first wooing scene, but it does so in ways that suggest the appeal of Richard is more than simply the erotic pull of political power. Charnes speaks for a large body of critics in arguing that 1.2 demonstrates "the discursive and libidinal identities between . . . political obsession and sexual fixation" (38), a compelling insight that dovetails well with modern psychological theory. However, the shifts from the first wooing scene to the second demonstrate the limitations of this view. In 4.4, Elizabeth *mère* is not the ultimate object of Richard's wooing, and the temptation he offers her is ostensibly political. Accordingly, Richard emphasizes his own political power ("the King, which may command, entreats" [266]) as an inducement, something he does not mention to Anne. But despite Richard's much greater political power in 4.4, his erotic hold on Elizabeth is much weaker than it is on Anne. Richard cannot generate a sufficient erotic charge through political power alone.

In fact, Richard succeeds in the second wooing scene only when he abandons the attempt to theorize his own method and returns to its practice, recapitulating his triumph over Anne with an even more virtuosic display of sinister poetics. As with Anne, the most blatant juxtaposition of Richard's past crimes and his ostensible future goodwill is precisely the rhetorical move that finally convinces the target of his wooing. When Elizabeth reminds Richard (and herself, for she is wavering) that "thou didst kill my children," Richard responds with some of the most wonderfully disturbing lines in all of Shakespeare: "But in your daughter's womb I bury them,/ Where in that nest of spicery they shall breed/ Selves of themselves, to your recomforture" (342–45). This conceit is followed immediately by Elizabeth's capitulatory line: "Shall I go win my daughter to thy will?" (346). Richard describes the womb of the young and innocent Elizabeth in highly suggestive terms, with the visually evocative *nest* and the osmically evocative *spicery*. Even readers who would applaud the sensual vividness of this description in, say, a Whitman poem might find it inappropriate in this context. The sexual implications are particularly disturbing because they suggest Richard's predatory and quasi-incestuous desire for Elizabeth—and, of course, because he is speaking to her mother. This would be adequate to demonstrate Shakespeare's point about the hideousness of Richard's attitude and his proposition. But excess is one of

the fundamental tools of Richard's sinister poetics. Therefore, Richard also describes the young Elizabeth's womb as the grave of her brothers, whom he has murdered. Then, he equates their corpses with his own seed, mingling images of death with the already unsavory thought of Richard having sex. Finally, he suggests that this impossible and revolting process is designed to comfort the mother of the girl who must endure it—at which point, ironically, she agrees to the plan, and the audience must assume that it will be carried out. The dizzying shifts of logical and metaphorical significance in this sequence call attention to Richard's conceit as a conceit—and its poetic intricacy is inextricable from its vileness.

Richard's inability to theorize his own skills suggests the limitations of his perspective, and could provide the play with an opportunity to reassert a normative moral and aesthetic framework by presenting a virtuous character who unifies theoretical and actual dramatic effects. But the play consistently avoids this opportunity, instead ceding the stage, the domain of artistic effects, to the sinister, leaving the exercise of goodness mostly in the realm of abstraction. This strategy appears most clearly in the play's failure to depict Elizabeth's eventual decision to give her daughter to Richmond instead of Richard. Her change of heart is essential to any redemptive narrative that the play might establish, because it structurally counterbalances Anne's failure to resist Richard and politically enables Richmond's successful reign. Yet the play minimizes the impact of this reversal by revealing it only through another character's brief, almost off-hand report (4.5.17–18). Because the play displays the poetic power of Richard's seduction, but avoids the poetic potential of Elizabeth's redemption, the audience misses an opportunity to experience an ethical and aesthetic resistance to Richard.[31]

Even though Richmond redeems England by defeating Richard, he fails to restore the dominance of a normative aesthetic in the play. Richmond's speeches consistently alternate images of England at peace, grateful wives, and mingled red and white roses with gory descriptions of Richard, sons butchering their fathers, and rivers of bloody tears. Rather than eliminating the sinister, Richmond seems to be trying to subordinate it to the beautiful in the service of a moral goal—to perform the reverse of Richard's grotesque juxtapositions. This admirable effort to achieve aesthetic balance could represent a poetic solution to the problem of the sinister if it were more successful.[32] But critics differ widely on the effectiveness of Richmond's speeches, and many of his most powerful moments rely primarily on the same sinister imagery that gives Richard's

speeches their poetic force. Hassel, who condemns Richard's rhetoric at the end of the play, makes a point of praising these lines from Richmond:

> The wretched, bloody, and usurping boar,
> That spoils your summer fields and fruitful vines,
> Swills your warm blood like wash, and makes his trough
> In your inbowelled bosoms. . . . (5.2.7–10; see Hassel 44)

Here, the images of England's prosperity are subordinated to the disturbing description of the monstrous boar, rather than the other way around.[33] Furthermore, the play avoids a direct dialogue between Richard and Richmond. By having Richmond kill Richard, Shakespeare dramatizes Richmond's superior physical, political, and perhaps even moral force. But by avoiding a rhetorical confrontation, Shakespeare leaves Richard's poetic power largely intact. This choice allows the redemptive narrative of the play to conclude without negating the play's sinister aesthetics.

7. CONCLUSION

Richard III owes its enduring popularity to its creation of a world in which foul is fair, and fair is largely absent. Richard's appeal goes beyond mere wit—the play also invests him with a demonic power and fascination, and presents his deformities as objects of aesthetic contemplation, poetic descanting, and sexual desire. By having the characters treat Richard as an aesthetic object and argue about what kind of representation he is, *Richard III* calls attention to the contradictions in Renaissance beliefs about the relationship between aesthetic appearance and moral value, seeming and identity. The play demonstrates the difficulty of choosing the good when outer appearances sometimes symbolize inner truths and sometimes deceptively conceal them. Moreover, the play dramatizes the knowing choice of evil. The wooing of Anne, far from being the play's weak point, is essential for establishing this theme. As the play progresses, the entire political realm follows the example of Anne's erotic perversity, succumbing to the appeal of deceptions whose theatrical artistry is visible even to their targets, as well as to the audience.

By depicting characters who serve as appreciative audiences to Richard's evil art, the play encourages a similar appreciation in the theater audience. The play invites the audience to enjoy hideous spectacles, such as Richard's deformity, and its focus on these spectacles leaves audiences with few alternative sources of poetic pleasure. While the characters in the play articulate theories that assert the ineffectiveness of the sinister, Richard's successes

continually undermine those theories. Even when the play destroys Richard, it makes no serious attempt to repress or refute the sinister poetics that make Richard such a powerful figure in the first place, allowing them to persist beyond his death.

Thus, although the primary embodiment of the sinister is defeated in the stage action, the sinister itself proves the dominant aesthetic in the world of the play. Most of Shakespeare's plays do not go quite so far, but the appeal of the sinister is by no means peculiar to *Richard III*, or to Shakespeare. As I have argued elsewhere, Milton's *Paradise Lost* appropriates sinister poetics from literary villains like Richard to complicate and enrich his portrayals of both Satan and God. Indeed, the tension between a normative or moralized aesthetic and the appeal of "the dark side" has been a pervasive element in Western poetry and popular culture, in the works of authors such as Edmund Burke, William Blake, and Edgar Allen Poe, and in popular genres like the Gothic novel and the modern horror movie.[34] It persists because it is an artistic response to a fundamental human question—namely, why people willingly embrace ideas, leaders, and actions that on a rational level they recognize as evil. The career of Shakespeare's *Richard III*, like that of Milton's Satan, suggests that evil can appeal to us aesthetically—that the socially given rules governing our appreciation of the good, true, and beautiful also recognize the power and beauty of monstrous evil.

NOTES

I would like to thank Paul Alpers, Kevis Goodman, and Albert Ascoli for reading many drafts and alternate versions of this essay. Joel Altman and Natasha Korda also provided invaluable advice, both in terms of framing the argument and suggesting avenues of research. In 2002, portions of an early version of the essay were presented at the Northern California Renaissance Conference, where I received helpful responses from Jeff Knapp, Alan Nelson, Winfried Schleiner, and many others.

1. Marguerite Waller also uses the language of psychopathology to suggest that Richard is (or should be) unattractive; see especially 162. Lisa S. Starks shifts the traditional psychoanalytic emphasis away from the relationship between characters' implied pasts and audiences' real ones, and toward the relationship between works of art and their audiences. Starks uses Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject to theorize audiences' ambivalent fascination with the hideous and deformed elements in *Titus Andronicus* and in modern horror films, thereby offering a more inclusive notion of what motivations can be psychologically realistic. Nonetheless, Starks shares the overriding psychoanalytic concern with the ways that literature generates and supports narratives of identity formation. Accordingly, she frames the abject as "that from which the subject must detach itself in order to form a separate identity" (122).

2. Critics have also had difficulties in explaining these kinds of responses. Fineman observes that the attraction to the dark lady "is not only unfortunate, but, in the tradition of erotic praise, essentially inexplicable, for just as there is no good reason for the poet to praise what he says is not praiseworthy, so too we cannot understand why the poet desires what he says is not desirable" (59).

3. Although the sinister refers to many of the same kinds of objects as the abject, the abject is a psychological concept with literary implications, whereas the sinister is a literary concept with psychological implications. Following Kristeva, Starks identifies the abject with a violation of order. The sinister, in contrast, is an aesthetic order that exploits the appeal of objects rejected by normative aesthetics.

4. Citations of *Richard III* refer to the 2000 Oxford edition by default. The text is based on the Quarto. Folio-only passages, printed in an appendix, are indicated by a letter and separate lineation.

5. Sidney is probably alluding to Aristotle's *Poetics* 4, which asserts that representations of hideous objects like corpses can give pleasure (37–39 in Halliwell's edition of the *Poetics*).

6. This disjunction between aesthetic pleasure and ethical significance has shaped the critical debate over Richard in the twentieth century. Robert C. Jones notes that "Studies of *Richard III* . . . openly reflect the divisive pull between theatrical attraction and moral judgment," and that Richard "provok[es] critics to assume extreme stances," from the "romantic enthusiasm" of Charles Lamb to the "moral orthodoxy" of E. M. W. Tillyard (20–21). More recent critics have reinforced this opposition, as well as the belief that Richard appeals to us despite, rather than because of, his evil. See Hammond 104–05, Hassel 4–5, Rackin 42, and E. E. Stoll 122–23.

7. Michael Torrey also notes this paradox, which he places in the context of Renaissance theories of physiognomy.

8. Richard himself offers a more complex version of this argument that seems to reverse the causality. He announces at the beginning of the play that because others perceive him as ugly, he cannot be a lover and is therefore "determinèd to prove a villain" (1.1.30). It is a slightly more troubled and self-excusing version of *Titus Andronicus*'s "Aaron will have his soul black like his face" (3.1.205), although the element of deliberate malevolence remains. Ugliness here is an ostensible cause of evil rather than a sign of it.

9. I prefer the Folio reading to Q1's "foul guile." In addition to its alliteration and assonance, "vice" alludes more clearly to the morality play tradition. Most importantly, it makes more sense for deceit to hide vice than guile. Unlike "foul," "deepe" emphasizes the contrast of outer surface and inner nature which the passage thematizes.

10. "In order to decide whether or not something is beautiful, we do not relate the representation by means of understanding to the object for cognition, but rather relate it by means of the imagination (perhaps combined with the understanding) to the subject and its feeling of pleasure or displeasure" (Kant 89).

11. Iago is the best Shakespearean example of a character who successfully conceals his true nature from all of the other characters. Othello's insistence that Iago is honest in his temptation scene (*Othello* 3.3) contrasts sharply with Anne's insistence that Richard is a liar in her wooing scene (*Richard III* 1.3).

12. Stephen Greenblatt alludes to this aspect of the Richard III story in his discussion of Thomas More's views on these transparently theatrical fictions of authority, what Greenblatt calls "sinister farce": "Richard III cast his ruthless seizure of the throne in the guise of an elaborate process of offer, refusal, renewed offer, and reluctant acceptance. The point is not that anyone is deceived by the charade, but that everyone is forced either to participate in it or to watch it silently" (13). Greenblatt's analysis of More is concerned primarily with the political use of drama. Shakespeare's *Richard III*, however, exploits the dramatic potential of the political use of drama.

13. In order to make it appear that Richard lusted specifically for the crown, Olivier not only added passages from *3 Henry VI* to his film version of *Richard III* (following Cibber's text of the play), he also inserted a silent coronation scene with the visual emblem of a giant golden crown suspended above the throne room. Rackin convincingly argues that *Richard III* does not belong to the same genre as the previous plays in the tetralogy, and that as tragedy, the play offers its audience a kind of pleasure distinct from that found in plays belonging more fully to the history genre.

14. Gurr 115.

15. For example, Rossiter 140.

16. "For Richard himself empties himself out in *Richard III*, doing away with selfhood and its nightmare origins and remaking himself in the shape of the perfect actor who has no being except in the roles he plays" (Adelman 8–9).

17. See *OED*, "method" definition 7a, which cites this passage.

18. For a detailed account of the instruction of Elizabethan actors, see Stern, especially 66–70.

19. See especially Orgel 70–71 and McMillin 232–33.

20. The Folio has twelve additional lines here, elaborating on Anne's ability to make Richard weep in spite of his manly nature. They work relatively well as standard courtly love discourse. Jowett's theory that the Q1 manuscript is a later version of the F manuscript, cut for performance, would suggest that someone found this passage relatively unimportant, even though it seems more likely to convince a potential mistress of Richard's sincerity than most of the lines retained in Q1. This hypothesis would support my theory that the scene is not about presenting plausible Petrarchan rhetoric.

21. Waller argues that Richard's "unselfconscious use of a Petrarchan conceit" to seduce Anne represents a failure of understanding and "labels him as at once a showoff and a dupe" (173). According to Waller, Richard makes a false "unironic assumption of mastery *over* his own (and Petrarch's) discourse" (173). But Richard's insistent juxtaposition of Petrarchan conceits with reminders of his own ruthlessness is the height of self-consciousness and produces a deliberately (and deliciously) complex rhetorical effect.

22. The Folio's "for I did kill King *Henrie* . . . 'twas I that stabb'd yong *Edward*" is slightly more vivid, less repetitive, and places Anne's husband and Richard's rival in the most rhetorically prominent position. This meshes well with 1.2.175–77, where Richard ignores Henry's murder entirely. It also avoids the Quarto's use of "your" in a passage where Richard otherwise consistently uses "thy." But both versions demonstrate the same basic juxtaposition.

23. See, for example, the corpse of King Henry, which Anne invites Richard and the audience to "behold" (1.2.52), as well as Elizabeth's references to her children, such as "The purple sap from her sweet brother's body" (4.4.253) and elsewhere.

24. For the Latin edition, see Heinimann and Kienzle.

25. Ultimately, Montaigne uses these theories to demonstrate a general human predilection for epistemological carelessness: ". . . notre imagination se trouve pareillement facile à recevoir des impressions de la fausseté, par bien frivoles apparences" (". . . our imagination is likewise found easie to receive impressions from falsehood, by very frivolous apparances" [380; 288]). Montaigne's concern about misleading appearances reflects Renaissance anxieties about the epistemological value of aesthetic pleasure in poetry.

26. Coppélia Kahn rightly argues that Richard's character includes both "realistic psychological" elements and stylized allegorical ones (63). As I have suggested, however, Richard's joy in evil for evil's sake is central to *Richard III*. In fact, accounts of Richard's normative desires for affection in *Richard III* rely heavily on external evidence from *3 Henry VI*—where, as Janet Adelman notes, Richard's character is fundamentally different (8–9, quoted above).

27. For the seminal study of the Vice tradition, see Bernard Spivack.

28. Richard's earlier acknowledgment of his own ugliness suggests that his sudden vanity is merely a sarcastic joke, part of a role that he temporarily assumes. Yet the same thing could be said of any of the faces that Richard presents to us; the real question is how persistent and productive is any given mask? In this case, Richard makes a point of returning to his vanity after he might plausibly have left it for good and ended the scene with the lines: "But first I'll turn yon fellow in his grave,/ And then return lamenting to my love" (1.2.245–46). Furthermore, the passage as a whole enacts the descanting on deformity to which Richard refers in his opening soliloquy.

29. The second wooing scene has provoked controversy at the most basic level of interpretation, namely whether or not Elizabeth actually agrees to marry her daughter to Richard. Jowett calls Elizabeth's response "inscrutable" (4.4.348–49n); Robert C. Jones calls it "perplexing" (55). Cibber's text gives Elizabeth an aside in which she announces her intent to dissemble, and many critics have followed the spirit, if not the letter, of this interpolation. Some recent critics, such as Rackin, even view Elizabeth's vacillation and acquiescence as a stinging rejection of Richard (38). Ultimately, though, it seems less contrived to assume that Richard's victory in the second wooing scene is genuine, though quickly negated. As Jones tactfully notes: ". . . if we were to enjoy the full ironic effect of Richard as the smug duper duped in his exchange with Elizabeth, we would need some more open pointers than the dialogue gives us" (55). Holinshed says that Elizabeth submits to Richard sincerely, out of avarice (Jowett 4.4.348–49n), and the play provides no explicit reinterpretation of its source, no hint of Elizabeth's capacity for duplicity in or prior to the scene. Indeed, if Elizabeth is feigning, she does so much more convincingly than Richard, a man referred to by his own mother as deceit personified. Richard's devices more closely resemble the clarity of Cibber than the proposed inscrutability of Elizabeth — they are always palpable to the audience, and often to his intended dupes as well. This theory, therefore, would require the play to employ a mode of representing deceit that it uses nowhere else.

Although Rackin treats Elizabeth's response as a matter "of so little consequence that it is never clearly specified in Shakespeare's script" (39), I see the apparent implausibility of Elizabeth's temporary acquiescence to Richard as parallel to Anne's and central to the play's exploration of the appeal of evil.

30. After Elizabeth yields, Richard describes her ambiguously as a "Relenting fool," suggesting he thinks her deceived, and a "shallow, changing woman," implying a predisposition to corruption in her nature (4.4.350). Here, as elsewhere in the play, the only causes that characters can offer for succumbing to Richard are his deceit and his victims' depravity.

31. Contrast the elaborately dramatized repentance of Gratiana in *The Revenger's Tragedy* 4.4, a significant turning point in, or counterbalance to, that play's presentation of ubiquitous moral decay. Like Elizabeth, Gratiana is seduced into knowingly offering her daughter to a powerful and vicious nobleman, but eventually she changes her mind.

32. The speeches show signs of rhetorical craft, but according to Hunter, Reese, Frey, and others, they lack energy. For a pro-Richmond view, and a summary of previous critical opinion, see Hassel's chapter "Richard versus Richmond: Aesthetic Warfare in Act 5" (35–56). The conclusions of the two orations are symptomatic of the difference between Richmond and Richard. Richmond ends with: "Sound drums and trumpets bold and cheerfully!/ God and Saint George! Richmond and victory!" (5.4.248–49), and Richard concludes with: "fair Saint George,/ Inspire us with the spleen of fiery dragons./ Upon them! Victory sits on our helms" (5.6.78–80). The fiery dragons are a darker and more striking image than the cheerful trumpets. As Hassel notes, Richard demonstrates his lack of a moral underpinning by slyly eliding the difference between Saint George and his traditional enemy, the dragon (Hassel 54–55). But it is this very richness of meaning that makes his lines superior as poetry. Richmond's instructions to the musicians are quite literal; Richard, in contrast, produces a vivid metaphor with ironic implications.

33. Thus, I disagree with Janet Adelman's suggestion that after 5.1 "aesthetic control of the play passes into the hands of the benevolent God who works through Richmond" (9).

34. Starks says that horror movies restore order by repudiating the abject: "Through the proliferation of images that evoke repulsion and transgressive viewing pleasure, horror films elicit masochistic thrills and exploit the audience's fascination with the abject. Inducing a cathartic effect, horror films exploit the abject in order to vanquish its power . . ." (124). Although Shakespeare's *Richard III* appears to follow this model, the persistence of the sinister in Richmond's discourse suggests that the play only pretends to eradicate the "transgressive viewing pleasure" of the sinister. To the extent that audiences have found this eradication unconvincing, the play's stratagem is itself a "palpable device," much like the horror movie technique of allowing the villain to survive his apparent destruction. In film, this device opens the door to sequels; in *Richard III*, it turns historical tragedy into a barely restrained celebration of the sinister.

WORKS CITED

Adelman, Janet. *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays,* Hamlet *to* The Tempest. New York: Routledge, 1992.

Aristotle. *Poetics*. Ed. and trans. Stephen Halliwell. Loeb Classical Library 199. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1995. Rpt. 1999.

Charnes, Linda. *Notorious Identity: Materializing the Subject in Shakespeare*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1993.

Erasmus, Desiderius. *Collected Works of Erasmus*. Trans. R. A. B. Mynors. Vol. 34. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1992.

Erasmus, Desiderius. *Opera Omnia Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami*. Ed. F. Heinimann and E. Kienzle. Vol. 2: 4. Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1987.

Fineman, Joel. *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye: The Invention of Poetic Subjectivity in the Sonnets*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1986.

Greenblatt, Stephen. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980.

Gurr, Andrew. *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996.

Hammond, Antony, ed. *The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare: King Richard III*. London: Methuen, 1981.

Hassel, R. Chris, Jr. *Songs of Death: Performance, Interpretation, and the Text of* Richard III. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1987.

Jones, Robert C. *Engagement with Knavery: Point of View in* Richard III, The Jew of Malta, Volpone, *and* The Revenger's Tragedy. Durham: Duke UP, 1986.

Kahn, Coppélia. *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1981.

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000.

Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1982.

McMillin, Scott. "The Sharer and His Boy: Rehearsing Shakespeare's Women." *From Script to Stage in Early Modern England*. Ed. Peter Holland and Stephen Orgel. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. 231–45.

Middleton, Thomas. *The Revenger's Tragedy*. *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*. Ed. David Bevington, et al. New York: Norton, 2002. 1297–369.

Montaigne, Michel de. *Essais*. Ed. André Tournon. Vol. 3. Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1998. 3 vols.

Montaigne, Michel de. *Essays*. Trans. John Florio. Vol 3. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1910. 3 vols.

Oestreich-Hart, Donna J. "'Therefore, Since I Cannot Prove a Lover.'" *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* 40.2 (Spring 2000): 241–60.

Orgel, Stephen. *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996.

Oxford English Dictionary Online. Oxford UP, 2006. <http://dictionary.oed.com>.

Rackin, Phyllis. "History into Tragedy: The Case of *Richard III*." *Shakespearean Tragedy and Gender*. Ed. Shirley Nelson Garner and Madelon Sprengnether. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996. 31–53.

Richard III. Dir. Laurence Olivier. With Laurence Olivier, John Gielgud, Claire Bloom. London Films, 1955.

Richmond, Hugh Macrae, ed. *Critical Essays on Shakespeare's* Richard III. New York: G. K. Hall, 1999.

Rossiter, A. P. "'Angel with Horns': The Unity of *Richard III*." 1961. *Critical Essays on Shakespear's* Richard III. Ed. Hugh Macrae Richmond. New York: G. K. Hall, 1999. 129–45.

Shakespeare, William. *The Tragedy of King Richard III*. Ed. John Jowett. New York: Oxford UP, 2000.

Shakespeare, William. *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*. Ed. David Bevington. New York: Longman, 1997.

Sidney, Sir Philip. "The Defence of Poesy." 1595. *Sir Philip Sidney: A Critical Edition of the Major Works*. Ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989. 212–50.

Slotkin, Joel. "Poetic Justice: Divine Punishment and Augustinian Chiaroscuro in *Paradise Lost*." *Milton Quarterly* 38.2 (May 2004): 100–27.

Spivack, Bernard. *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil: The History of a Metaphor in Relation to His Major Villains*. New York: Columbia UP, 1958.

Starks, Lisa S. "Cinema of Cruelty: Powers of Horror in Julie Taymor's *Titus*." *The Reel Shakespeare: Alternative Cinema and Theory*. Ed. Lisa S. Starks and Courtney Lehmann. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2002. 121–42.

Stern, Tiffany. *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan*. Oxford: Clarendon, 2000.

Stoll, Elmer Edgar. "Give the Devil His Due: A Reply to Mr. Lewis." *Review of English Studies* 20.78 (April 1944): 108–24.

Torrey, Michael. "'The plain devil and dissembling looks': Ambivalent Physiognomy and Shakespeare's *Richard III*." *English Literary Renaissance* 30.2 (Spring 2000): 123–53.

Waller, Marguerite. "Usurpation, Seduction, and the Problematics of the Proper: A 'Deconstructive,' 'Feminist' Rereading of the Seductions of Richard and Anne in Shakespeare's *Richard III*." *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*. Ed. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986. 159–74.