'I do mistake my person all this while': Blindness and Illusion in *Richard III*[1]

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> […] and in those holes
> Where eyes did once inhabit there were crept,
> As 'twere in scorn of eyes, reflecting gems, (*R. III*, I. 4. 27–29)

> To be disfigured means primarily the loss of the eyes, turned to 'stony orbs' or to empty holes[2]

> Despite the fact that the site of Richard's grave was apparently both known and marked in the early 17th Century, that same century was to witness the growth of an extraordinary legend. According to this legend, at the time of the Dissolution, Richard's body had been dug up, dragged through the streets of Leicester by a jeering mob, and finally hurled into the river Soar near Bow Bridge. […] The legend has unfortunately become self-perpetuating, […] so well known that to this day, it is still widely accepted as fact.[3]

In 1995, David Troughton's Richard appeared in a jester's outfit.[4] Richard certainly shares attributes with the Fool, just as both have common roots in a third figure, the Vice.[5] Although this is no straightforward case of shared identity, establishing a link may provide a point of departure for a reading of the play based on the necessarily related notions of inscription and circumscription, interrelationships of 'texts',[6] and the 'blind spot of the text as the organiser of the space of the vision contained in the text, and the vision's concomitant

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[1] William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Richard III*, ed. by John Jowett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), I. 2. 237. All subsequent references are to this edition, which will be referred to in the text as '*Richard III*' or in quotations as '*R. III*'. This article was first presented as a paper at the Colloquium on *Bad Behaviour in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* organised by the Centre of Medieval and Early Modern Studies at the University of Kent at Canterbury, 3rd December 2009.

[2] Paul de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 100.

[3] John Ashdown-Hill, 'The Fate of Richard III's Body', in *BBC: Legacies – Myths and Legends – England – Local Legends: Leicester*
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/legacies/myths_legends/england/leicester/article_1.shtml> [accessed 21 July 2009].

[4] David Troughton played Richard in the RSC's production at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, in 1995. John Jowett delivers a compelling description of the production, in his introduction to *The Tragedy of King Richard III*, ed. by John Jowett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 108.

[5] Robert Weimann, 'Performance-Game and Representation in *Richard III*', in *Textual and Theatrical Shakespeare: Questions of Evidence*, ed. by Edward Pechter (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1996), pp. 74-75.

[6] Following Jacques Derrida, in the term '*text*' I include all 'symbolic' formulations that 'always already' stand between us and absolute presence and are also the only point of (indirect) access. 'Text' in its Derridean sense is 'not merely […] "writing in the narrow sense"', Spivak, in her introduction to Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 1976), p. lxix.

blindness.'[7] The displacement and replacement of Richard's *corpus* by another corpus, one of self-perpetuating myths and an intricate intertext, further reinforces this enthralling impression of an extending web around an elusive figure.

It is generally acknowledged that one of the factors that connect Richard, the Vice, and the 'Fool' is their apparent awareness of a meta-theatrical dimension to the 'text'.[8] The additional awareness suggested by this meta-dimension may appear to exceed the frame.[9] Richard himself draws attention to his kinship with the Vice figure: 'like the formal Vice Iniquity' (*R. III*, III. 1. 82). However, the word 'like' poses some difficulty, disconnecting while it offers similarity.[10] This essay will attempt a deconstruction of the meta-dimension, exploring both its extent and its limitations. It is my thesis that, within Richard's meta-awareness, lies the seed of its undoing: a blind spot. For Richard does not merely stand at the borders but also casts himself as protagonist in his own script. Already this indicates a split, opening up a 'space of writing'.

1.   'Now […]': Richard writing Richard

Significantly, as John Jowett points out, 'of Shakespeare's major protagonists, Richard is the only one to begin the play addressing the audience'.[11] Richard instantly establishes a link with both his offstage audience and the immediate present, thus contributing to the illusion that all is being written 'Now' (*R. III*, I. 1. 1). Richard seems to be writing himself into being, just as he manipulates other characters and the audience. He announces entrances and seems to envelop events in his consciousness;[12] so long as events appear to occur, as it were, on cue, the illusion is sustained. Richard's heightened awareness and control of the situation are indeed accepted as givens by some critics, who, by adopting Richard's point of view as their filter and implicitly incorporating the character's own (initial) assumptions into their reading, bind themselves to the same 'blindness' that afflicts Richard. John Palmer is a striking

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[7]   Wlad Godzich, in his introduction to Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 1983), p. xxix.

[8]   '[Richard's] capacity to isolate himself from the action, to manipulate events, and to form a special relationship with the audience all reflect his consanguinity with Marlowe's Barabas in *The Jew of Malta* (c.1590) and, behind him, the Vice of medieval drama' (Jowett, p. 27). David Wiles charts the development from Vice to Fool, noting their shared meta-theatricality. David Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clown: Actor and Text in the Elizabethan Playhouse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 1–10.

[9]   See Colin Counsell on exceeding the frame, Colin Counsell, *Signs of Performance: an Introduction to Twentieth-Century Theatre* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 207-230. 'Metatheatricality' (a term introduced by Lionel Abel in *Metatheatre: A New View of Dramatic Form* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1963)) involves the use of intensely self-conscious devices which draw attention to the medium and its status as art or textual construct. My interest here is precisely the awareness it implies, with its apparent leap over the frame.

[10]   'This recognition of similitude also admits difference' (Jowett, p. 31).

[11]   Jowett, p. 27.

[12]   'Here Clarence comes', *Richard III*, I. 1. 41.

example: 'What we like and admire in Richard is that he knows, as the politicians seldom know, precisely what he is doing.'[13] But although Richard seems to claim both pivotal centrality and control of boundaries and opens the play in a manner implying an act of framing and a movement towards a monologic resolution, neither the end nor the refusal to end belongs to him.

The assumptions which govern meta-theatricality/meta-textuality, are, in this instance, more complex than might be suspected. The level of the relationship between actor and embodiment of role may usefully, but provisionally, be viewed in Meyerholdian terms: where the actor = A_1 shaping A_2.[14] Richard is such an actor in his turn: in the manner of A_1, he takes on the task of shaping his role as A_2 in 'his own' play. A comment by Jan Kott on a performance he had watched is particularly revealing: 'Woszczerowicz is a great actor, but his Richard is an even greater actor.'[15] Kott's suggestion is that Richard may usurp the actor who plays him; my suggestion is that this is only one in a series of displacements.

As Linda Hutcheon asserts, 'no text is without its intertext.'[16] *Richard III*, and Richard (setting even his own body up as 'text'), are no exceptions. Richard's assumption of supremacy in his own script is 'always already' undermined by the complex interplay that results from the multi-layering of 'texts' in *Richard III*: its own internal weave and the surrounding texts with which it has connections, namely those that with it comprise the First Tetralogy[17], and, still within the web of extending textuality, its sources and influences, both literary and historical.[18] Richard is a 'spider' (*R. III*, I. 3. 242) in a web of his own devising

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[13] John Palmer, *Political and Comic Characters of Shakespeare* (London: MacMillan, 1965), p. 101.

[14] 'The formula for acting may be expressed as follows: N = A1 + A2 (where N = the actor; A1 = the artist who conceives the ideas and issues the instructions necessary for its execution; A2 = the executant who executes the conception of A1)', the 'material' being the actor's body as a 'means of expression'. Vsevolod Meyerhold, *Meyerhold On Theatre*, ed. and trans. by Edward Braun (London: Methuen, 1969); p. 198.

[15] Jan Kott on Woszczerowicz's production of *Richard III* at the Atheneum Theatre in Warsaw, 1960. Jan Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (New York: Norton, 1964), pp. 52-53. Kott already invokes this metatheatrical awareness when he specifies that 'actor' in this context implies someone 'above the part' (p.53); applying this term to both Woszczerowicz *and* Richard.

[16] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. vii.

[17] The First Tetralogy comprises Shakespeare's *King Henry VI Part 1*, (ed. by Edward Burns (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2000)), *King Henry VI Part 2*, (ed. by Ronald Knowles (Surrey: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1999)), *King Henry VI Part 3*, (ed. by John D. Cox and Eric Rasmussen (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2001)) and *King Richard III*. Further references will be to these editions. The plays themselves will be referred in the text respectively as '*1, 2 or 3 Henry VI*' and in quotations as '*1, 2 or 3 H. VI*', as the case may be.

[18] Jowett explores Shakespeare's sources and influences, both literary and historical (pp. 22-25). The very notion of 'history' is itself perhaps inconceivable outside historiography, the writings that could be held to constitute it. 'History' itself, in any case, is 'a text [that] conserves the values of legibility' (Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, pp. lxxxix-xc). Marjorie Garber sees Richard as emblematic of this process of writing and defacing history. Marjorie Garber, 'Descanting on Deformity: *Richard III* and the Shape of History', in *Shakespeare's Ghost Writers: Literature as Uncanny Causality* (New York and London: Methuen, 1987), pp. 28–51.

but he fails to see that it becomes subsumed into a larger network. The textual weave marks out the space Shakespeare's Richard is to occupy, 'overdetermining' even while it offers potentiality.[19]

2.   '[…] all these bitter names': intertexts — countertexts

Perhaps the most obvious 'counter-text' to Richard's manifests itself in Margaret. Margaret's first appearance in the play is in effect as a shadow (she stands on the margins) and an echo, taking her cue from what is said, inserting her bitter invectives within the gaps between dissenting voices. Since her comments occur initially on the margins of the scene and she herself has been relegated to the status of 'outsider', she sets up another Bakhtinian 'centre of consciousness' to rival Richard's, also an outsider in this 'weak-piping time of peace' (*R. III*, I. 1. 24). Her containment and freedom are alike curtailed and incomplete. She is on a border, not merely in the implied spatial dynamics of the scene onstage, but also a temporal one; she is furthermore the most visible vehicle for the echoes of the preceding plays in the First Tetralogy that haunt *Richard III*. She sees that the future is already inscribed in the past, and the past in the future. Her power of seeing turns her curses into what may be seen as a rival script within the play and makes her strength equal to Richard's. However, unlike Richard's energy, which seems positive and progressive, hers seems negative (betokening the power of reversal feeding parasitically on another's power). Richard's 'Now' confirms the immediacy of theatrical 'presence', sharing the illusion with the audience, while Margaret complicates these assumptions of 'present' and 'presence', ushering in the voices of past and future, and with them the unsettling murmurs of absences.

Her text, employing reversal and erasure as devices but never completely effacing the text upon which it depends, is, in effect, a *palimpsest* as Gérard Genette uses the term.[20] Richard's rise must occur in order for him to fall; her curses and prophecies must inhabit the world of those they target, even while they seem to spin a web around it. Texts are set up *in relation to* others, in a relationship of mutual dependency. A palimpsest does not entirely drown out the text it inhabits and rewrites, for it derives its power from that very text, and

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[19]   The word 'overdetermined' here recalls Garber's argument that Richard's deformity is a meta-historical 'suppositious presupposition', a ghostly rewriting and deformation of history: with 'every misshaped part an overdetermined text to be interpreted and moralised'. Garber, pp. 36–37.

[20]   'On the same parchment, one text can become superimposed upon another, which it does not quite conceal but allows to show through.' Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. by Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), pp. 398–99.

vice-versa.[21] The 'hypertext' after all carves out its space within the space of the 'hypotext':[22] they share the space. Furthermore, Margaret inscribes her curses within the terms of her own tragedy, in a play of substitutions: 'Edward thy son, which now is Prince of Wales, / For Edward my son, which was Prince of Wales' (*R. III*, I. 3. 196–97). Margaret tells Richard as much: '[I make] but repetition of what thou hast marred' (*R. III*, I. 3. 165).

Richard becomes the medium for the revenge she wills against others, a fact that undermines his sole authorship.[23] He is required by both his text and hers to perform actions that are, initially, of benefit to both; the texts exist within each other, for now, as it were, symbiotically though the relationship might later turn parasitic. Margaret thus attaches her own counter-signature to Richard's signature, not thereby obliterating it but rather using and undermining it. Her tragedy is past; she is no longer ostensibly the 'centre'; her place has been usurped, but the very frustration of her desires fuels her power. The only power Margaret has is that of *words*. She has neither illusion nor hope of any other kind of power.[24] Her words, later compounded by the 'chorus' of women, are indeed those of mourning but also of remembrance.

Richard's response, his effort to silence or suppress the (re)writing, takes an interesting turn in the scene in which Margaret first appears in this play. Unable to stem the flow of her curses, his tactic is instead to deflect them, to turn them against their speaker simply by *inserting* her name; his retaliation operates within her own words, searching for the loophole in which to turn them around. Richard seems to recognise the power of 'writing' and is here able to manipulate the curses and deflect them from the target intended by their 'original' speaker. Words thus severed demonstrably from their 'source' and lines between speakers become blurred, their intended targets seemingly interchangeable. It is, therefore, slightly startling to hear Richard himself, in a moment of alarming blindness, reclaim the curses for himself: 'I had thought / That thou hadst called me all these bitter names' (*R. III*, I. 3. 235–36). In voicing this, he attaches to the words his own reading that reinforces Margaret's. Richard has already shown himself dextrous in his use of language and equivocation, especially in the

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[21] The relationship is typically bi-directional; her curses and prophecies empower even as they undermine; the women later ask her to 'teach [them] how to curse' (*Richard III*, IV. 4. 111); and as characters fall victim to Richard they realise their only hope for revenge is through her text (*Richard III*, III. 3. 15-7), lending it their own voices even posthumously, through ghostly apparitions.

[22] Genette, pp. 5–7.

[23] As Jowett writes, 'Richard prospers by becoming her avenging demon' (Jowett, p. 25).

[24] See *Richard III*, I. 3. 193; IV. 4. 110–25.

matter of names.[25] However, not realising that he, too, is textually bound by the language he uses and abuses so dextrously and that the act of writing himself into being is only enabled by the pre-existence of the text, Richard still thinks that he can mould both the play's text and himself. Language itself is more 'dissembling' even than he, concealing as much as it reveals, hiding the blind spot. In Paul de Man's words: 'We try to protect ourselves against [the persistent negative movement that resides in being] by inventing stratagems, ruses of language and of thought that hide an irrevocable fall. The existence of these strategies reveals the supremacy of the negative power they are trying to circumvent.'[26]

Richard's 'ruses' are many; his use of words is matched by the use of his body as a kind of medium, indeed, a text. His appeals to corporeality and presence occur alongside his claims to greater flexibility and instability of shape (he describes himself as both 'rudely stamped' and as having eluded 'fair proportion' (*R. III*, I. 1. 16–18)) and suggest a more atavistic 'body', 'like to a chaos' (*3 H. VI*, III. 2. 161). Derrida asserts that body language is not an escape from the bonds of text into something 'essential' and 'personal' and close to the source: as soon as they materialise, the shape (and shaping) of a body, its figuration and disfiguration, are 'always already' figured as signs, never as an intrinsic attribute of the source. *Richard III* is ostensibly Richard's story but one that has 'always already' been 'stolen' from him: 'Furtiveness is thus the quality of dispossession which always empties out speech as it eludes itself.'[27] Richard is indeed '*curtailed* of this fair proportion, / *Cheated* of feature' (*R. III*, I. 1. 18–19: my emphases) but appears blind to the full implications of his own words.

3.   'Methought I saw […]': the intrusion of spectres

In the tightly-woven fabric of Richard's textual self-realisation appear loopholes that allow other texts to intrude, insert and attach themselves. However, this intertwining is not so much an avenue *out* of the state of textuality as ways *into* the text(s) which is 'simultaneously infinitely open and infinitely reflecting on itself, *"an eye in an eye"*.'[28] In this view, intertextuality is conceived as texts which lead into other texts, embed themselves within texts and contain *within themselves* loopholes through which other texts can insinuate themselves,

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[25] '"G" / Of Edward's heirs the murderer shall be,' (*R. III*, I. 1. 39-40); 'Plantagenet […] / The selfsame name, but one of better nature,' (*R. III*, I. 2. 139–41); 'I moralise two meanings in one word.' (*R. III*, III. 1. 83).

[26] De Man, *Blindness and Insight*, p. 73.

[27] Derrida, 'La Parole Soufflée', in *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 222–23.

[28] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, pp. 298-9. Derrida further writes: The 'field' of language is 'that of *play*, that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions only because it is finite.'

in the manner of the Derridean 'countersignature'. A kind of osmosis occurs across the boundaries between texts, but the implied free play cannot escape the intertwining of the network.

Is death an exit, an escape? 'O no, my dream was lengthened after life' (*R. III,* I. 4. 40). The autothanatology (as 'a study of the impact of death's *completed* approach on one writing a self-portrait'[29]) implied by Clarence's dream extending beyond the moment of death prefigures the later emergence of ghosts in its evocation of the 'impossible' scenario of the voice from beyond the grave. Clarence, imprisoned in the Tower as a result of his brother Richard's schemes, dreams of dying and damnation. Death here is only an *apparent* exit, only an entrance into a text closely interwoven with the other texts, for death cannot be articulated or represented in any other way: 'the writing of the dead resists being understood as anything but the script of the living.'[30] Clarence's vision of hell is declaredly informed by that which 'poets write of', including 'that grim ferryman', 'a shadow like an angel', and 'Furies' (*R. III*, I. 4. 40–60). Graham Holderness observes, 'Clarence's […] individual nightmare is formalised into a classical visit to the underworld, clearly signalled by overt literary reference.'[31] Clarence, like Hastings, misreads the dream. Their 'failure' to read lies in their refusal or inability to acknowledge their life as characters in yet another text, subject to the same mechanisms as a dream, susceptible to the same 'insight' and 'blindness' and partaking of the dream's status as a text to be read. Clarence's reading of the dream places himself at its centre. The persistence as the centre of vision of the first person's 'I' and 'eye', even throughout its submersion in water, is striking in this speech: 'Methought I saw […] Methought I had [...]' (*R. III*, I. 4. 23, 34, respectively). Richard's role remains shadowy and peripheral: 'Methought that Gloucester stumbled' (*R. III*, I. 4. 17). The extent of Clarence's vision, even as it seems to transcend time and space by continuing after death is however cruelly undermined by the mockery of the unseeing 'reflecting gems' (*R. III*, I. 4. 29), replacing eyes that see with blindness.

Thus 'spectres', allowed entry, threaten to occupy the same space and steadily gain ground on the 'flesh-and-blood' characters, exposing their shared characteristics as textual constructs. It is the nature of the spectre to trespass, to intrude, to challenge those boundaries,

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[29] Ivan Callus, '(Auto)Thanatography or (Auto)Thanatology?: Mark C. Taylor, Simon Critchley and the Writing of the Dead', *Forum of Modern Language Studies*, 41. 4 (October 2005), p. 427–28 (p. 432).
[30] Callus, p. 238.
[31] Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare: The Histories* (Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 2000), p. 87. Jowett also describes Clarence's dream as 'classically informed' (p. 24).

to be undecidable: 'one does not know if it is living or if it is dead.'[32] The proliferation of texts all possess a 'remainder'[33] that ensures that their reading is incomplete: the centre itself that organises them and around which they revolve always an absent presence.

4.   'like to a chaos': Richard's self-portraiture

By the very act of (*self-*)*inscription*, Richard is necessarily *circumscribed*. His 'shape' is always one that has 'always already' been established by necessarily-preceding texts. Furthermore, it now informs future 'Richards' (in stage-productions, readings of Shakespeare's Richard, or indeed any writing that attaches itself to the historical or literary figure that is 'Richard') that, whether adopting or rejecting this Richard, forever evoke him. Harold Bloom provocatively suggests that a strong text informs our reading of related weaker texts, intertextual influences working both backward and forward in time.[34] Indeed, in the manner of Bloom's 'Apophrades', Shakespeare's *Richard III* cannot help but be evoked by other representations of Richard whether preceding or following.

Richard's self-portraits in *3 Henry VI* and *Richard III* are attempts not simply to draw form but to emphasise formlessness; they are exercises in deformation. This harking back to what is almost a pre-formed state, a malleable 'essence' of shapelessness ('unfinished'; 'like to a chaos' (*R. III,* I. 1. 20, and *3 H. VI*, III. 2. 161, respectively)) is offered as a prelude to reconstruction, reshaping: the apparently infinite possibilities thus glimpsed turn Richard's deformity into strength. What he seemingly fails to realise is that the notion of 'possibilities' also carries within itself the sinister evocation of 'impossibilities', which in turn delimit and define those possibilities. Richard seems blind to the irony of using a classical allusion ('Proteus') to describe his ability to 'change shapes' (3 *H. VI*, III. 2. 192), for he is acknowledging a precedent, without totally recognising its significance: Richard is 'always already' precluded from being the 'original'. 'Change shapes' is indeed key here, for it presupposes shape and its substitution by another shape, in a 'chain of supplementarity',[35] rather than an originary shapelessness. The equivocal word 'like' in 'like to a chaos', as previously noted, introduces a play of difference and *différance* alongside similarity. As we have seen, Richard opens *Richard III*, but the play's (and his) 'beginning' stretches back into

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[32]   Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), p. 5.

[33]   See Jacques Derrida, 'The Purveyor of Truth', in *The Purloined Poe: Lacan, Derrida and Psychoanalytic Reading,* ed. by John P. Muller and William J. Richardson (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1988), pp. 73–212.

[34]   Thus, a stronger text appears to have given rise to its 'sources', which are invariably read *through* it. 'Apophrades, or The Return of The Dead', in Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 139–55.

[35]   Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, pp. 153–57.

the other plays of the First Tetralogy and beyond … the 'original' historical Richard himself has 'always already' been displaced by texts. The 'beginning', as well as the 'end', eludes Richard.

This elusion returns us to the issue of the blind spot. Blindness is a necessary condition for self-portraiture, which is what Richard attempts in *3 Henry VI* and in *Richard III*. Richard's self-portrait takes its vantage-point from *within* the text, and his vision is therefore incomplete, necessarily adopting

> the monocular stare of a narcissistic cyclops: a single eye open, […] fixed firmly on its own image. […] The staring eye always resembles an eye of the blind, sometimes the eye of the dead […] Looking at itself seeing, it also sees itself disappear right at the moment when the drawing tries desperately to recapture it. For this cyclops eye sees nothing, nothing but an eye that it thus prevents from seeing anything at all.[36]

Similarly, one of Richard's hands is overactive in an effort to compensate for his other, 'withered' (*R. III*, III. 4. 74) hand. The incompleteness of his self-writing gesture is ensured.

Richard, 'scarce half made up' (*R. III*, I. 1. 21), presents his own body as raw material amenable to moulding, the text born even as he himself is born. However, although the play *appears* to be within the describing arc of his shaping, misshapen hand, his genesis outside the text is seemingly beyond his control. His birth is not actually presented in the text,[37] but *re-presented* by the text. Its existence outside the text is elusive, the 'truth' surrounding its circumstances indistinguishable from proliferating myth and the over-determination of conflicting accounts. He is both 'sent before [his] time' (*R. III,* I. 1. 20) and has spent too much time in his mother's womb, as his mother's admonishing 'I have stayed for thee' (*R. III*, IV. 4. 155) would seem to imply.

The 'sun' is a key image in the play, both in presence and absence, as on the sunless morning of the final battle: 'The sun will not be seen today' (*R. III*, V. 5. 12). It enables vision but is also blinding, resisting capture.[38] At one point, Richard proposes to replace the sun, as a condition for vision, with a simulacrum that seems self-derived: 'Shine out, fair sun – till I have bought a glass' (*R. III,* I. 3. 247). However, the mirror image is as inaccessible as the sun and the shadows cast by the sun; yet shadow or reflection is the only way in which he can view himself. Although the image, in both cases, is never the thing itself, it acquires a force of

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[36] Jacques Derrida, 'From Memoirs of the Blind*'*, in *The Derrida Reader: Writing Performances*, ed. by Julian Wolfreys (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), pp. 179–80.
[37] Nor in the preceding plays of the Tetralogy.
[38] De Man's discussion of the sun image in Shelley is enlightening: see de Man, 'Shelley Disfigured', in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, pp. 93–123.

its own.[39] The mirror-image is inadequate and incomplete in the picture it reflects (and projects); it implies presence, while forever making it elude us, fostering an illusion of control over the self by its manifestation as 'other', while decentring 'self': 'the unreachable reflection of Narcissus, the manifestation of shape at the expense of its possession.'[40] Richard's own vision of himself is not unmediated and never complete.

Richard is both right and wrong when he tells the young Prince:

> Nor more can you distinguish of a man
> Than by his outward show, which God He knows
> Seldom or never jumpeth with the heart.   (*R. III*, III. 1. 9–11)

In his textualisation of the very body, the grotesquely over-visible representation has displaced the essence: 'It is the strange essence of the supplement not to have essentiality.'[41] As a text to be read, it represents and reveals the absent presence of any 'heart', and there remains nothing *to* hide. The text is all there is to 'distinguish', and Richard *is* readable. However, Richard seems blind to the irony that his 'lie' also taps a 'truth': the erasure of essence always leaves a trace, which reveals itself in other texts, the dreams, conscience and curses that Richard tries to suppress, and, in so doing, testifies to the dislocation between 'heart' and 'outward show', which he experiences as a loss of centre on the eve of battle and which 'double layers' his awareness, while painfully accentuating the 'absent presence' of the pivot which structures this association.

In the play, the only prophecy and curse apparently unfulfilled is Anne's and this concerns Richard's child: 'If ever he have child, abortive be it' (*R. III*, I. 2. 20–23). The convolutions of this curse are interesting, for it analeptically looks back to an event that has *already* occurred. Richard's child can only refer back, in a striking reversal, to Richard's attempt at self-[re]creation, abortive and curtailed as it is.

5.   Theme and variations: Richard parodies Richard

Richard is circumscribed by the relentless circularity and onward course of the play, in its progression via convolution and reversion. Richard's text eventually turns around, folding in upon itself, and entraps him within its folds. Palmer writes, 'Richard, after the death of the princes, is like an artist who has put the finishing touch to a masterpiece.'[42] And that 'masterpiece' is his apparent self-creation. Reflection makes us blind. It turns us relentlessly

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[39]   See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 147.
[40]   De Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, p. 109.
[41]   Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 314.
[42]   Palmer, p. 103.

back to the realm of the 'visible', the articulable. The women, in the manner of a chorus, increasingly emphasise the boundaries of his world. Once he gains the crown, episodes start to mirror earlier episodes with a difference that makes them parodic in their effect.[43] This recreates the dynamics of the previous 'text', with conditions changed and the balance altered.[44] Thrown back into the textual weave, Richard can only parody Richard. Palmer draws a striking analogy: 'The musical counterpart to "Richard III" would be, not a symphony, but a set of variations of the early classic type. Our interest lies in the composer's ingenious, almost playful, embroidery of a theme which remains essentially the same.'[45] The subtle turns and re-turns are a feature of Richard 'Crookback' himself; his bent back, his web-weaving, his ability to use others' words against themselves.

Parody is never an innocent mirroring; the influence works both ways: the parodying text depends, of course, upon the anteriority and coexistence of the parodied but it also affects the way we read, or reread, the parodied text, rereading a parodied text through the parodying one, the question of anteriority wraps itself in a 'double-bind'.[46]

As Palmer notes, 'the scene in which Richard sets out to persuade Elizabeth to further his suit to her daughter is but a pale reflection of the earlier scene in which he wooed the Lady Anne.'[47] Palmer is right in seeing more 'artificiality' on this second occasion[48], for here, the artificiality is heightened: the elusiveness of the thing becomes apparent, even as that thing escapes. Palmer however fails to read backwards and see what the second episode discloses about that first, apparently unequivocal, triumph, for it underlines what was always there: supplementarity. Richard's efforts to cast himself in and occupy fully and adequately a role or break the textual mould to fit his own (necessarily incomplete) self-conceived image are always foiled by the interminable *différance* of an endless 'supplementarity'.[49] Both wooings occur by proxy, by substitution: in his wooing of Anne, Richard leaps into the place of both Edward and Henry, bound by 'selfsame name' (*R. III*, I. 2. 141); he wholeheartedly offers

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[43] Bakhtin views parody as 'repetition' with 'difference'. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. by Caryl Emerson, Introduction by Wayne C. Booth (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 194–9. Genette identifies the parodic formula as one of 'imitation' and 'transformation' (*Palimpsests*, pp. 1–30).

[44] The parodying text, in the manner of a palimpsest, also inscribes within it the parodied text and thus creates a relationship of mutual dependence. See Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (New York: Methuen, 1985) p. 26.

[45] Palmer, pp. 85–86.

[46] On the double-bind's problematisation of the question of anteriority, see Jacques Derrida, 'Aphorism-Countertime', in *Acts of Literature*, ed. by Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 414–33.

[47] Palmer, p. 104.

[48] Ibid., p. 105.

[49] For Derrida's discussion of the 'supplement', see Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, pp. 152–57.

himself as supplement: 'The readiest way to make the wench amends / Is to become her husband and her father' (*R. III*, I. 1. 154–5). Incidentally, this substitution bodes ill for Richard, in terms of Margaret's text; for he 'casts' himself precisely (though inadequately) in those roles that Margaret demands of him: 'A husband and a son thou owest to me' (*R. III*, I. 3. 167). In the case of Elizabeth, she represents her daughter. Richard's failure in this latter enterprise exposes both his grasp of naught but the supplement and the fact that Richard never held anything *but* the supplement. This also extends to Richard's opening address to the audience 'now', at the beginning of the play. Derrida writes: 'supplementary mediations […] produce the sense of the very thing they defer: the mirage […] of immediate presence'.[50] Moreover, the inadequacy of the supplement necessitates its 'exorbitance'.[51] Margaret's hunger for revenge makes demands that exceed her loss of a son: the deaths of eight enemies 'match not the high perfection of my loss' (*R. III*, IV. 4. 61).

6.   '— But where tomorrow?': the hunted boar

Holderness notes that 'towards the play's close […] both the voices he has sought to still, and the ghosts of those dead he has endeavoured to silence, return'.[52] Dreams, prophecies and curses abound and insert themselves in the manner of texts into the gaps in Richard's text/consciousness. Richard is given a glimpse of what the 'blank page' *may* hold. But the reversal has started before that, in the self-parody of the text. Richard has had his game, now it is the text's turn to reveal its own ludic potential.

When Richard's 'text' reaches its bounds, he can only turn and re-turn, like a hunted boar.[53] Things move frighteningly into reverse; as the illusion of the end forces the text to turn back upon itself, the past to return, and Richard to haunt Richard ('I and I' (*R. III*, V. 4. 162)). Richard's vow 'by the time to come – ' (*R. III*, IV. 4. 307) is tellingly *curtailed*, cut short, by a turn back to the past in Elizabeth's swift (and too-precipitate) response: 'That thou hast wronged in time o'erpast' (*R. III*, IV. 4. 308–09). Richard is haunted both by the return of the past and the uncertainty of the blank pages of the future ('Here will I lie tonight – / But where tomorrow?' (*R. III*, V. 3. 7-8)). Richard here recognises the blind spot and his limitations; however: 'locat[ing] its functioning' does not facilitate his *reading* of it.[54] Rather, he accepts

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[50]   Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 157.
[51]   Ibid.
[52]   Holderness, p. 84.
[53]   The Boar was Richard's heraldic personal device and is an image frequently associated with Richard in the play, for example in Stanley's dream: 'He dreamt tonight the boar had razed his helm.' (*Richard III*, III. 2. 9).
[54]   'It does not suffice to locate [the blind spot's] functioning in order to *see* its meaning.' Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 149.

his role as one component in the sometimes-savage interplay of texts. Jowett maintains that 'it could even be argued that the entire play's vantage point is that of Richard on the eve of the battle, a Richard on the point of death.'[55] This Mallarméan terror of the blank page evokes its haunting *potential* as well as its implications of the unreadable and thence of blindness, an inscrutable blankness that stares back at him, returning his gaze and turning his gaze onto himself and into the text. [56] Richard's sun-deprived day of death perhaps signals this acknowledgement of his finitude that, however, takes place in the night that refuses to end, even as it turns into dawn; the night that surrenders him to the infinite. He is already cohabiting with the spectres of the night.

Richard's confession that shadows may strike more terror than substance can is revealing.[57] The substance marching upon him becomes the shadow: following, even perversely aping, by coming unnaturally *after* its shadow. Richard has already faced combat with the ghosts; Richmond's advance is the mere re-enactment of what has already, in a sense, happened. Richard is past fear, as he is past the worst. Perverse reversal this might be but it awakens in him the recognition that the text he thought himself to be writing has limitations, and he is upon its edge just at the break of a sunless dawn, between day and night, between life and death, unredeemed.

Just as the dead Richard is displaced by his literary, historical, and dramatic counterpart(s), in order to appear, the ghosts must acquire a status similar to that of the 'living' characters, possessing equal rights to space-and-time and sharing a common textuality. Furthermore, the irrepressible myths involving the displacement of the historical Richard's physical body and multiplicity of possible grave-sites are symptomatic of the tendency of narratives to proliferate and the fascinating elusion of bodies trapped in a winding and restless circularity.

It has become increasingly evident throughout that Richard's shoulders can neither 'bear [the] burden' nor 'endure the load' (*R. III*, III. 7. 211–12). They are furthermore unable to bear the weight of the crown that, instead of *being borne* by his 'misshaped trunk', 'round impale[s]' it (*3 H. VI Part 3*, III. 2. 170–71), undermining his capacity to bear and reversing

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[55] Jowett, p. 67.

[56] See also: Maurice Blanchot, *Space of Literature*, trans. by Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press).

[57]   By the Apostle Paul, shadows tonight
      Have struck more terror to the soul of Richard
      Than can the substance of ten thousand soldiers
      Armèd in proof and led by shallow Richmond.   (*R. III*, V. 4. 195–98)

the positions of possession and containment. I would like to borrow one of Richard's own metaphors, a metaphor that later becomes terrifyingly literalised in a changed context. The '*horse*', as a symbol of bearing,[58] is shown to be furtive *and* necessary, not at Richard's command. The vehicle, the container and carrier, language itself, the containing text, overtakes Richard. In yet another reversal, Richard's cry, 'A horse! A horse!' (*R. III*, V. 6. 7), recalls an earlier metaphorical 'horse' and invites us to read the text backward: where before he has 'run before [his] horse to market' (*R. III*, I. 2. 159), the horse has now overtaken him, and it is he who becomes the *pursuer*. Yet it is a necessity that Richard recognises too late. He is at first dismissive, thinking it possible for him to 'run before', but the truth is that his 'horse', language and the text, is always before *and* after, beginning *and* end, and forever eludes capture.

7.   Richard III or *Richard III*?

The play's title contributes to the illusion that Richard is the centre. But is the title identifiable with the 'entity' that is Richard? Richard is, in a sense, defeated by Richard, but which Richard – Richard III or *Richard III*? 'Richard III' is self-evidently eponymous; but the issues raised cannot be so readily resolved. Does Richard write his own play, or are he and his playing-field 'always already' pre-established by the name of the play?

Richard III is not exclusively about Richard III. Among other things, the play charts the story of Richard of Gloucester's transformation into Richard III. Richard seems to possess the play but he does not possess its name from the outset. Once he becomes king, neither can he free himself from the shackles of that name (King Richard III) that bind him to the text *King Richard III*; nor can the illusion of control can be sustained. He can no longer delude himself that he could 'put on some other shape' (*R. III*, IV. 4. 262) or control the text that bears his name and relentlessly and endlessly inscribes and re-inscribes him. He is displaced by a name, yet cannot dissociate himself from it. The nature of the name's double-bind[59] entails that it is simultaneously *other than* himself, and *inalienable* from him. The name *precedes* and *survives* the person. 'The scandal is that the sign, the image, or the representer, become forces and make "the world move".'[60]

The paradox is that while Richard seems to possess awareness of himself as text, he is blind to the supplementarity that this entails. He assumes, at least initially, that he is the

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[58] In at least one sense of the word; though 'bearing' in its connotations of genesis and birth may also be recalled.

[59] Derrida, 'Aphorism–Countertime'.

[60] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 147

source and can retain control; but as soon as writing touches 'Chaos', it is bound. Added irony lies in the fact that Richard does not have the last word. Perhaps there is no last word, for the play ends on a hope, not a certainty, still overshadowed by the lingering traces of 'blood' and 'treason': 'Abate the edge of traitors, gracious Lord, / That would reduce these bloody days again / And make poor England weep in streams of blood' (*R. III*, V. 7. 35–37). Ricardian traces, echoes and images contaminate Richmond's closing speech, infiltrating the very promise and potential present in the future (or present-in-the-future; or indeed, carving out a debt in the present of the future that Richmond seems to offer). Richmond's promises of 'peace' moreover, only acquire their full force when set in opposition to the memory of terror. Replacement itself is never complete; it never eradicates the traces of what went before or lies beneath and it reminds us constantly of what it seeks to erase (or deface), for, in Margaret's words, it always 'buildeth in [another's] eyrie's nest' (*R. III*, I. 3. 270).

Conclusion

Richard's quest for an origin, in seeking to create it and encompass it, poses interesting questions for the process of literary creation itself. If Richard is 'author' only in a limited sense, where then, should we look for the 'real Author': that shadowy figure *par excellence*, Shakespeare, simultaneously 'Everything and Nothing'?[61] May one posit a circle of control 'beyond'? Yes, and another, on and on, in our endless quest for one organising consciousness. One may posit more than one centre or circle, but as for seeking the ultimate centre of authorial voice, that is likely to remain a blind-spot, whence one may indeed deduce that Shakespeare's singular dissemination[62] is deeply and inextricably bound to this continued elusion.

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[61] Jorge Luis Borges, 'Everything and Nothing', in *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, ed. by Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (New York: New Directions, 1964), pp. 248–49.

[62] On the 'dissemination' of the 'singular', 'that which cannot be picked up or sublated', the 'dissemination [which] pluralises any singularity that allows one to say "the"', see Jacques Derrida, *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*, trans. by Christine Irizarry (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 284. See also: Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. by Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000). In the course of a discussion on Shakespeare and *Hamlet*, Derrida observes that a masterpiece 'always resists and defies after the fashion of a spectral thing'. Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, pp. 20–21.

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