

INTRODUCTION

PREFACE

SHAKESPEARE'S SEARCH FOR THE ESSENCE OF DRAMATIC FORM

Artistic Links takes as its governing theme the idea that Shakespeare's imagination was triggered by the assertions of a band of citizens in Thomas More's *History of King Richard III* who complained that Richard obtained the crown of England by "performing on scaffolds." More saw Richard as a vain actor whose schemes were invariably transparent. In the "stage plays" that More was condemning Shakespeare saw a dramatic flair he wanted to imitate. More's vivid descriptions of Richard's penchant for deceiving audiences, it seems, inspired Shakespeare's investigations of Richard's methods: "Can I use Richard's techniques to make Richard's story work on stage?" Shakespeare, we argue, challenged himself to reproduce Richard's methods by postulating a Richard who objected to More's denigration of his talents and who would provide his own version of the magnificent series of deceptions through which he obtained the crown. His Richard would win more than a crown; he would win over the theater audience. The book studies the process through which Shakespeare transformed the eloquent narrative prose of More's *History* into compelling drama by mounting each segment of Richard's "autobiography" on a reversal structure that would become the hallmark of his mature style. Shakespeare takes More's archetypal tyrant and transforms him into a consummate dramatist who offers his theater audience a showcase of well-crafted scenes. Our scene-by-scene analysis presents a detailed account of the discoveries Shakespeare made while writing *Richard III* that transformed him from the upstart crow his colleagues deemed him to the artist Ben Jonson lauded for being able to "strike the second heat / Upon the Muses anvil." The book is written for all lovers of the theater—actors, directors, playwrights, theater-goers, critics, and scholars—and for those general readers who wish to understand how Shakespeare first learned to transform prose narrative into dramatic action, how Shakespeare crafts those ubiquitous

180-degree reversals in his mature plays, and how the Shakespearean reversal differs from the better-known *de casibus* and Aristotelian reversals. The authors feel that Shakespeare's interaction with Thomas More's Richard should be heralded as the making of Shakespeare.

Because one of the primary goals of this study is to correct misconceptions arising from long-standing critical dependence upon abridged and excerpted versions of More's life of Richard, we hope that our readers will have both Shakespeare's play and More's complete prose history open on the desk when contemplating and judging the comparisons made here. Several modern editions of the *History* are now available. Growing acquaintance with More's text confirmed for us an insight expressed long ago by R. Chris Hassel, whose study of "performance, interpretation, and the text of *Richard III*" precedes our study by several decades. Hassel, examining Shakespeare's fifth-act adaptation of Hall's *Chronicle*, made an important observation. He discovered that if he worked directly from Bullough's *Narrative Sources* his impressions of Shakespeare's artistry would be distorted. It was imperative to have Hall's complete text before him. Hear Hassel's reasoning:

The Tudor historian Edward Hall is a major source for the two battle orations, and indeed for much of the public utterance of Richmond and Richard during act 5. As we know, Hall is particularly good at contriving speeches for his public figures. . . . It is therefore instructive to watch Shakespeare adapting Hall's orations to his own purposes. . . . Repeatedly, though not exclusively, Shakespeare seems to be making changes that diminish the attractiveness of Hall's Richard and enhance that of Hall's Richmond, particularly to suit the aesthetics of the stage.

And here is the crux of Hassel's insight (*italics added*):

I will emphasize Shakespeare's omissions from Hall for two reasons. *Geoffrey Bullough's widely read and indispensable work on Shakespeare's sources is heavily biased toward what is included or paraphrased, and therefore rather disguises the importance and the scope of Shakespeare's omissions. Even more important, what Shakespeare omits from Hall seems particularly relevant to our consideration of the aesthetic counterpointing of Richard and Richmond.* (36–40)

Though we are not studying individual speeches, as Hassel was, but, rather, the context Shakespeare creates for his characters' speeches, our own experience in working with Shakespeare's source for the first four acts of *Richard III* confirms what Hassel found in working with Hall's *Chronicle* on the fifth act. One cannot work from abridgements. Not even Bullough's.

Scholars whose experience of Thomas More's *History* depends primarily on the excerpts from More found in Bullough's *Narrative Sources* have a strong sense of the likenesses between the two works. They often seem unaware of the differences—those elements that give us a fuller picture of Shakespeare's creative imagination. Hassel states that one won't find in Bullough *what Shakespeare has omitted*. Let us state that neither will one find in Bullough *what Shakespeare has added*, and the additions have even greater significance. We hope that our concentration, not so much on the similarities as on the differences between Thomas More's *History of King Richard III* and William Shakespeare's *Tragedy of Richard III*, will expand the existing perspective. Our sharply focused study of these two radically different Richards has been designed to reveal how, at some point in the early 1590s, Shakespeare learned how to transform *narrative* into *action* and became the playwright we know and revere as Shakespeare.

The critical method applied in this book is closely allied to that found in *The Craft of Fiction*, Percy Lubbock's study of the writing techniques of Flaubert, Thackeray, Balzac, Tolstoy, and James, which was declared by E. M. Forster to "lay a sure foundation for the aesthetics of fiction." Our interest lies in the aesthetics of drama: we would argue that Shakespeare's relationship to the aesthetics of drama has much in common with Henry James's relationship to the aesthetics of the novel. Both understood the secrets of the craft. Lubbock, as Mark Schorer says, "performed the great service of compressing into the small compass of *The Craft of Fiction*, and of making coherent there, those major concerns of James that pertained to craftsmanship, to the means that permit the novelist to deal with his material at all" (Foreword). We examine Shakespeare's plays from the same perspective. How was Shakespeare's work crafted? Not how was his *poetry* crafted, but how did he craft his *action*?

Unlike modern writers, Shakespeare did not invent his stories. His method, from the beginning of his career to the end, was to take an existing source, a narrative work, and transform it for presentation on the stage. His plays, up until the writing of *Richard III*, utilized the standard rhetorical techniques of the era, as did the plays of his contemporaries, Nashe, Greene, Peele, Kyd, and Marlowe. That experiments were being made with form, Medieval models being merged with classical models, is well known, and the evolutionary process has been so thoroughly studied that in our discussion of *Richard III* we can assume that our readers are familiar with these aspects of theater history. Our study focuses on Shakespeare's discovery of the dramatic unit that became the hallmark of his style.

There is a trend in Shakespeare criticism that considers Shakespeare as a dramatic poet. Skilled rhetoricians, literary critics, tend to focus on

Shakespeare's well-crafted speeches as the carriers of the dramatic content. Shakespeare's poetic dialogue naturally accounts for much of the acclaim his plays receive.¹ But the Shakespeare of the *Henry VI* plays was a dramatic poet. One must distinguish the Shakespeare of *Richard III* as a poetic dramatist. This book assumes that Shakespeare himself was aware of the difference and that he was striving to surpass his fellows in this regard. He could write the mighty line as well as Marlowe could. But he sensed that there was more to drama than dialogue. The secrets of Shakespeare's scenic structure can never be derived from a study that focuses on those aspects that the drama has in common with the craft of the orator. Similarly, looking for the elements of Shakespeare's scenic structure by engaging with recent work in early modern theater history, including recent studies of early modern modes of acting and dramatic practices, can hardly be as fruitful as engaging with Shakespeare's text, as Vergil engaged with Homer, as Spenser engaged with Vergil and Chaucer, as More engaged with Suetonius, as T. S. Eliot engaged with Dante. Scholars who confine their studies of the plays to recent work on rhetoric or stage practice by Tudor scholars have missed the point. One has to start with what Shakespeare ultimately expressed in his art about the relationship between experience and reality and somehow intuit how or where he developed the forms to express it.²

The question we are addressing is how did Shakespeare the poet find the form that imbued his already magnificent rhetoric with drama of the kind that one first sees in Richard of Gloucester's encounter with Anne Neville? To answer this question one has to consider the depth with which Shakespeare himself was engaging with explorations of human consciousness and reality. As opposed to the theatrical *entertainer* who is perennially on the lookout for some snappy innovation sufficiently ingenious and raw to supply the required escapist amusement to the tired and bored, the *dramatist* is in search of a form that will imbue his material with a sense of reality. Shakespeare, like Sophocles before him, discovered in the reversal motif a form that shadows the tension and movement of existence, a form that is itself pregnant with meaning.

If we are crediting Shakespeare's units of action with mirroring the tension of existence, a word or two should be said concerning what we understand the nature of this existence to be. What we know of reality we experience through consciousness. However, there is not, as some have speculated, an all-embracing universal consciousness of which each of us is supposed to be a microcosm. On the contrary, the only consciousness that exists is that which is to be found in each individual human being. Yet neither consciousness nor reality is as fragmentary as this statement might seem to imply. Paradoxically, despite the fact that the only place

to find consciousness is in the individual physical human beings who have lived lives separated not only by vast distances on the globe but also by enormous gaps in time, all of mankind shares one history by virtue of participating in the same reality through our common experience of individual consciousness. This community of being is experienced with such intimacy as to override the separateness of both time and space. This drama of existence that human beings are conscious of participating in neither begins nor ends with the individual; it is a shared reality common to all, a given, not the product of human creativity. To be fully human means to be a participating member without knowing how or why.

Though there are two aspects to human experience, consciousness and reality, it is a distortion to speak of them as independent entities. Reality is known only insofar as we participate in it through our consciousness. And likewise, neither is consciousness ever experienced independently but only as a consciousness of something. Thus, consciousness and reality are both known only through experience. We experience participating in reality through our consciousness of it. Beyond the things that we are aware of as real—the people, the furniture, the houses, the automobiles, and so on—there is an awareness of reality as an encompassing whole that cannot be made the subject of investigation the way particular objects can. We cannot escape beyond the encompassing reality to view it and ourselves within it from some remote vantage point. Such objectivity is not available to us.

The reality that we are conscious of participating in is constituted of a multiplicity of hierarchically arranged polar opposites, the magnetic power of which generates a field of tension between them. It is in this realm of tension between the opposing forces of reality that human life is experienced. On the metaphysical level, we are confronted by such opposing poles of tension as the divine and the human, time and timelessness, salvation and damnation, good and evil. Similarly, on the social level, reality is experienced as sets of competing forces arranged as polar opposites between which there is unending flux and tension—belief and nonbelief, order and disorder, war and peace, liberty and restraint, work and leisure, wealth and poverty. Nor does the individual escape from the experience of tension when his consciousness turns inward. There, he is confronted with the same undying struggle of opposing possibilities, established by our reason and passion. Each of the emotions, desires, and appetites has its polar opposite—joy and sorrow, love and hate, trust and jealousy, hope and despair. Though at any particular time one pole may predominate, that dominance is never permanent, because none of the forces can ever eliminate its opposite, so that the possibility for change is ever present. Life, therefore, is lived in a state of continual tension

between this array of polar opposites. Thus situated, life is characterized by flux and change, which breed uncertainty, which produces anxiety and its opposite, serenity.

That Shakespeare was early aware of this quality of life being lived in the tension between opposing possibilities in all the dimensions of reality is captured in a brief speech he wrote for King Henry in *3 Henry VI*:

Master Lieutenant, now that God and friends
 Have shaken Edward from the regal seat,
 And turn'd my captive state to liberty,
 My fear to hope, my sorrows unto joys,
 At our enlargement what are thy due fees? (*3H6*, 4.6.1–5)

For Henry, with his release from the Tower prison, every level of existence has undergone a change characterized by a swing between polar opposites.³

While Henry's speech hardly constitutes a dramatic unit, it tells us that even before Shakespeare has discovered his unit of action, he was, in his poetry, casting experience in the same terms he will use later, and if the polarities King Henry moves between here are those typical of the units of action Shakespeare creates while writing *Richard III*, they are also—and not coincidentally—those forces of reality between which consciousness is held in tension.

It is Shakespeare's continuing insight that the overarching reality of life is reflected in the formal elements of art. Once Shakespeare made the discovery of the dramatic unit, he applied it everywhere. Units based on the reversal are to be found throughout the second historical tetralogy, in all the subsequent comedies, and, of course, most characteristically, in all the tragedies; moreover, these units come in assorted sizes (beat, sequence, scene, act). For such a constricting structural element to be so widely applicable seems to imply that there is something about the tension of human existence that this formal reversal structure captures and conveys.

The Shakespearean reversal has much in common with two similar literary forms, the *de casibus* reversal and the Aristotelian reversal, but should not be confused with either. *De casibus* and Aristotelian reversals both hinge on the human need to distinguish between reality and appearance, which are, of course, seminal polarities. But the experiential quality of living in the tensions between polarities (emphasized in Shakespeare) is not the point of either of these types of reversals. Both treat the central figure's discovery of the polarity between appearance and reality and consequent movement from one plane to the other as a *unique* experience,

as Plato does in his myth of the cave. The individual passes from darkness or ignorance to the light of knowledge. The journey between these opposites requires a total re-orientation of one's being.

In the de casibus story, the reversal usually coincides with the end of life. Similarly, the Aristotelian reversal occurs in the final act of a tragedy. The fact that knowledge of reality is withheld from the protagonist until the climactic moment is the artist's acknowledgment of the determinative nature of this set of polarities—first, in the extraordinary difficulty connected with dislodging oneself from the world view produced by commitment to illusion and, second, in the price one pays in abandoning the comfort of illusion. Despite the loss involved, ultimately the protagonist's re-orientation, though late in coming, signals the revelation that is the reward for the struggle he has endured and his fidelity to continuing undaunted in his quest.

Shakespeare's insight does not diminish the importance of the individual's moving from the plane of illusion to that of reality. It does, however, place this alteration into a wider context that embraces pairs of polarities, the nature of experience itself. The individual is constantly fluctuating between multitudes of sets of polarities. The chief distinction between the Shakespearean reversal and the two more widely recognized forms lies in the adaptability of Shakespeare's template. It can be used as well in act 1 or act 3 as in act 5, as our exploration of Shakespeare's use of the technique in *Richard III* will demonstrate.

Shakespeare's Formal Proclamation

For all of these reasons, we assume that Shakespeare was conscious of the change that was occurring in his work as a result of his encounter with More's *History of King Richard III*. He knew that he had made a breakthrough, that (one might say) he had discovered certain "secrets of the craft." Our emphasis on Richard's role in constructing his own play has the ulterior motive of supporting our contention that the play was written as a showcase for the new type of scenic structure Shakespeare is offering to his contemporaries. Throughout the play Shakespeare is constructing scenes that depend for their effect on a 180-degree reversal. Working reversals is Richard's *métier*. Richard begs his audience to pay attention to the form. In that portion of the play in which Richard is cast as playwright and presenter, Richard turns out one splendid scene after another, with each action cast in the form of a dramatic reversal.⁴

It is our belief that in setting Richard the task of wooing Lady Anne Neville, Shakespeare was challenging himself as much as he was challenging Richard. The scene is proffered as a model and a template: "this is

what a scene should be.” In the Lady Anne scene, Shakespeare was showcasing a form of scenic structure that is based on the principle of the 180-degree reversal. That this form becomes the hallmark of Shakespeare’s style and that it manifests itself throughout the mature works of his canon we have already demonstrated in our earlier book, *Analyzing Shakespeare Action: Scene Versus Sequence*. No wonder then that Shakespeare gives the Lady Anne scene first place in his play, just as Richard gives it first place in his own demonstration of his abilities as a manipulator.

Scholars often ask why Shakespeare had Richard insinuate that his marriage to Lady Anne was going to advance his chances of gaining the crown. The character refers to “some secret close intent” (1.1.158) that is never disclosed. The wooing scene does many things, but in terms of the otherwise closely plotted action, it goes nowhere. It depicts an isolated episode, with nothing leading up to it and with nothing in the subsequent action being dependent on it. C. H. Herford, J. Dover Wilson, and John Jowett, addressing the presence of the scene in their editions of *Richard III*, all agree that “Shakespeare palms off on the audience a highly effective scene [that] ‘does not advance . . . the career of Richard in the least.’”⁵ John W. Blanpied makes the same observation just as emphatically—“Never, before or after, was it clear that Richard really needed Anne for worldly ambitions; the success itself was certainly the point” (69). Indeed—the success itself—the success in the scene of both Richard as lover and Shakespeare as playwright. If the dramatic question of *Richard III* is *Can Richard maneuver his way to the throne of England?* his marriage to Anne—as presented in the play—doesn’t forward that pursuit. The Anne scene is not found in Thomas More, nor does its addition either facilitate or impede Richard’s progress toward the crown. There is no historical basis, no eye-witness description, of Richard’s wooing of Anne Neville. And though there are earlier plays in which Richard goes a-wooing, there is no dramatic precedent for this wooing scene’s formal elements.⁶ There is good reason for this. The scene has no basis in reality. It is pure drama! It is the creation of a mind set on dramatic considerations, independent of historical fact, independent even of probability.

For centuries, Shakespeare’s public has given Richard the rave reviews he was seeking. Critical studies of our own day are lavish in their praise of this particular scene. It is thought to be the epitome of all that separates *Richard III* from the plays that preceded it in Shakespeare’s canon. Hugh Richmond speaks of “the hypnotic versatility of mind and expression which Richard exercises against Anne” (*King Richard III*, 85). Edward Berry writes, “the seduction of Anne provides the play’s most shocking emblem of Richard’s mysterious power, what Moulton calls ‘a secret force of irresistible will,’ and at the same time defines in precise dramatic

terms the nature of the evil which brings it into being" (78). The scene is praised specifically for its dramatic power as a scene that electrifies audiences (as the rhetorical scenes between the lamenting ladies in the play do not). It is renowned for offering the kind of role that the greatest Shakespearean actors have wanted to play and made their fame in. It has, in fact, been lauded as "Richard's masterpiece, its quality and method matched by only one other in Shakespeare—the great seduction scene in *Othello*" (Spivack, 405).

Yet, for some reason, Shakespeare scholars are still seeking elsewhere for the answer to the question, *How did Shakespeare become Shakespeare?* This can only mean that scholars have not paid sufficient attention to Richard's jubilant boast at the end of the Lady Anne scene.

Was ever woman in this humor woo'd?

Was ever woman in this humor won? (1.2.227–28)

At one level the speaker is obviously Richard, in the role of presenter, stepping forward to continue the running conversation that he is carrying on with the audience. And in that sense it is a marvelously handled example of mock humility combined with malicious gloating over his successful deception of the naively self-centered Lady Anne. But that accounts only for what is happening at the story level of the plot. At the metadramatic level, the soliloquy resonates with far greater meaning. This is Shakespeare's announcement of his arrival on the London stage. He is proclaiming the presence of a new dramatic consciousness bursting like Athena onto the Elizabethan scene, full-blown and demanding acknowledgment. As Harold Bloom suggests, "Richard's gusto is more than theatrical; his triumphalism blends into theatricalism, and becomes Shakespeare's celebration of his medium and so of his rapidly developing art" (73). No longer will he be one of the numerous hack writers employed by the likes of Philip Henslowe to collaborate in patching together topical entertainments from whatever sources lie ready at hand. No longer will he be the theatrical drudge updating shop-worn Roman comedies. No longer will he be numbered among those tiresome adapters of English history who were continuously elbowing one another, jockeying for position, and then complaining when they felt their toes had been stepped on. Shakespeare is proclaiming that, with the advent of the scene just witnessed, all of this has changed. Having discovered the approach that enabled him to write the Lady Anne scene, he knew that a new day had dawned. No one would ever call him an upstart crow again. He was now fully fledged in his own bright plumage. He is calling all to witness the product of his strong hand, to acknowledge the daunting power that had just been unveiled.

From the start Shakespeare had set himself the task of transforming narrative into drama rather than continuing to do what the other dramatists were satisfied with, which was too often merely staging narrative in dialogue form. But he had never quite gotten the knack of it. Now Shakespeare has taken Richard as his mentor, and in following Richard to his victory, Shakespeare has found what it was that had so far been eluding him. Now, finally, he was presenting the first fruits of his labors. If, as is said to have happened, the cry of “eureka!” broke from the lips of Archimedes at the moment when he discovered how to separate pure gold from dross, this was Shakespeare’s “eureka! moment.” This truly is an extraordinary moment, not just in the play but also in the history of British drama. Shakespeare single-handedly made Jacobean drama and modern drama possible. The chapters that follow are designed to bear out our contention that Richard (and Shakespeare himself, we would venture) want posterity to look carefully at how these scenes have been crafted and to observe, from their own experience in the theater, that the scenes *work*.