A Study of *King Richard Ⅲ*

—Richard's Evil Dominates the Play—

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Abstract

This paper is one attempt to analyse the structure of Shakespeare's History *Richard Ⅲ* and to consider Richard's evilness and the process of his obtaining the English crown and the way of his falling from it. There are many thematic and historical connections between the *Henry Ⅵ* trilogy and this play. This play is usually classified as a History. But this classification is still ambiguous because there are many phases of this play. This play has an ambivalent element between the tragedy and the history.

This play is described as a rigid Tudor scheme of retributive justice and a straightforward dramatisation of the Tudor myth. The course of events is guided by a simple process of divine justice, dispensing rewards and punishment on earth. On the other hand, it is described as a comic history or tragic history, in which cruel and relentless things prevail. The reason is that excessive cruelty becomes comic. And some critics take Richard for a tragic hero. This play could be classified as a tragedy. This is because Richard has a complicated character and a tragic element while other characters may appear as flat characters which E. M. Foster described in his *Aspects of the Novels*. Saintly Richmond is a good example of it. He acts as England's saviour who destroys Richard's evilness, brings the end of the War of Roses and makes England peaceful.

The wave-like working of Fortune and Fate in history is introduced into the dramatic form in Shakespeare's Histories. In them many nobles are forced to be involved whether they would like to participate in the political struggle or not. It does not matter whether it is for or against their will. Jan Kott wisely says, the 'Grand Mechanism' in the history works on them. There are bloody conflicts of the years of civil strife and pitiless butchery in it. The struggle for power is dominant. Richard's Machiavellian ambitions surface in the *3 Henry Ⅵ*, but there is little sign of his development as the Vice, one of the stock figures of the morality plays, in that play. In this play Richard's evil face reveals. We cannot deny the influence of Seneca, the Italian tragedian.

Richard has an ardent desire to be king. Richard relentlessly takes every bloody method for the attainment of the crown. He does not hesitate to murder many nobles, even his brother, Clarence, and his family, whom he thinks of his immediate obstruction on his way to the throne. Richard is called devil often enough in the play. And Richard is a master of appearances, which other characters cannot distinguish from reality, and he utilises his appearance for their own sake in the political situation at court. Richard is much more a realistic character with intelligible motivation than Iago or some other villains in Shakespeare's plays. It is due to Richard's discernment of character. In the play there is loss of the absolute power. The status of the king seems to be an unstable position. Things do not continue to be perpetual. So the political argument for the usurpation is loudly brought forth by Richard who would merrily feign his true mind before others.

In this play two wooing scenes take place. They make a parallel structure of the play. In the early part of the play, Richard confesses his urgent love to Lady Anne who is the daughter of Warwick and the widow of Henry's son Edward. Later, Richard asks Queen Elizabeth for the hands of her daughter Elizabeth, who is his niece by King Edward and Queen Elizabeth.

One of Richard's first plots which he tells in Act I scene i involves marrying Lady Anne. He wishes to secure his power. When he woos her over the corpse of Henry VI, Anne says that Richard's real names are devil, minister of hell, villain, murderer in Act I scene ii. And she violently accuses him of his murderous deeds, including killing her husband and her father-in-law. She almost stubs him with the dagger, which he hands to her when he boldly kneels before her, takes way his shirt and opens his breast.

The most characteristic thing is that Richard cleverly shifts his position from a willful murderer to her lover and he will be her husband in the future. And Richard takes away her role as a grieving daughter or innocent victim and assigns her the role as a cruel mistress who obstinately refuses his love. He says, "Your beauty was the cause of that effect:" (I. ii. 125) and "So I might live one hour in your sweet bosom." (28) Now he is a passionate lover craving for Anne's love. This clever shift of his position is very effective on her. She has to play the role he gives her. Richard always acts many roles in the play. In this scene he acts as an honest wooer. After Richard honestly admits his hideous guilt, he boldly confesses, "But 'twas thy beauty that provoked me." (I. ii. 184) At this speech, she drops the sword which Richard handed her, though she could have killed Richard with it. Maurice Charney wisely explains that Anne is not deceived but is absorbed in Richard's outrageous inscrutability. Anne cannot distinguish whether Richard is a lover or a villain. She must be utterly confused by his sudden and unexpected confession of love on the way to the funeral. We find that she responds with a mixture of grief and delight. She does not know at all how to make a response to Richard's words. Richard acts as a lover so well that we cannot even decide whether he is true or not, though we were already informed of his malicious intent before this scene.

When Anne accepts his proposal, we are so surprised that we can hardly believe it. We have much doubt of whether she clearly understands her position or not. It may be called an interesting and, at the same time, a ridiculous moment in the play. Richard wins because he is stronger, especially as he is a York, a brother to the king and a Duke with the power to control the situation. In addition, he even vigorously asserts the value of love, beauty, loyalty and justice in order to obtain her.

The second wooing scene in Act IV scene iv is a dramatic revision of the earlier courtship of Anne. It can be said that a closely related parallelism exists in the repeated occurrence in the play. Richard begins by attempting the same trick with Elizabeth in seeking the hands of her daughter. Elizabeth knows Richard's ambitious intent and his way of removing obstructions to secure the crown. She deliberately manages to escape Richard's language, his art of speech and his rhetorical stratagems by which Anne was trapped. She fully understands that her position is weak and unstable in the royal family. It could be said that the women in the play have no political power and they are meek as a lamb.

Richard must change his stratagem because Richard is defensive to Elizabeth who knows him better than Anne did. Richard voluntary offers his most extreme pledge to her. He describes his plan to perpetuate the Yorkist succession with which Elizabeth must be much concerned. He has to ally with Elizabeth and her daughter out of political necessity. But she is not sure that he will fulfill his promise. Her repeated questions in this scene show that she is not completely persuaded by him but that she cannot help to accepting his proposal and being involved in his well-devised plan. She still hesitates to approve it because she does not know which way is better to protect her daughter. She reluctantly decides that this is a better plan for her daughter to survive in the royal family. It comes from mother's love.

Both wooing scenes are very interesting because we can see Richard's technique in manipulating other minds to his own will. It is one of his characteristic ways to control others in the play. We see Richard's power to dominate his enemies. He boasts proudly of his seductive power. According to Richard, nature gives lovers a beautiful shape, in spite of being deformed. Richard understands that the world can be manipulated. And both times he succeeds in getting his brides. His success is due to his technique. And he is immensely attractive, though the other characters described Richard as in terms of the most loathsome

and despised element of nature, e. g. a toad, a snake, a bottled spider and so on. We can find a variety of animal' imagery of Richard in the play. Maurice Charney gives us another reason why Richard wins in both scenes. He says that Shakespeare's villains, including Richard, are more deeply misogynistic because they believe that love does not exist, only lust. And Richard feels superior to women because he thinks them stupid and governed by lust.

In the first soliloquy Richard identifies himself as an actor, wearing many masks, performing many roles. He announces his evil intents and says, "I am determined to prove a villain." (Ⅰ. i. 30) In it Richard speaks as if he were observing himself and painting his own portrait in detail. His words immediately effect to us in such a way that we are almost persuaded that they are a reasonable response to his personal problems, deforms, ugly and out of work. Richard always has a plan. His speech contains a number of indirect stage directions. As Ralph Berry points out, Richard eagerly seeks to seduce the audience. Bernard Spivack tells that soliloquies should be played as direct address to the audience. Richard describes to the audience his plan of what he is going to do in order to be the king of England. He even appears to accept being "Cheated of feature by dissembling Nature". (Ⅰ. i. 19) Wolfgang Clemen explains that the blend of harsh cynicism and richness of metaphor is characteristic of the protagonist's speeches. And in addition, Richard's method of self-interrogation is still dominated by his intellect.

Richard plays many roles and he can make the most dazzling series of roles in the play. He can develop them with rare grace and skill. We can make up an extensive list of his roles. He is a faithful friend, a loving brother, a passionate wooer, the heir reluctantly called to the throne, a king, a protector-uncle, a lover, a murderer and a villain. According to the situation demanded, he can act one role for the characters to make believe them. To the princes, for example, he says, "I moralize two meanings in one word." (Ⅲ. i. 83) He enjoys word-play.

He knows that he is an outsider from birth, and he might have some sense of being a 'bastard' of nature. Richard appears to understand himself fully and appreciates his deformity and limitations from the beginning. It is said that the deformity is an outward and visible sign of his inward spiritual gracelessness. He himself uses it as an excuse. And Wolfgang Clemen makes a comment on the deformity,

> the physical deformity which Richard refers to with such self-deprecating wit has been used by many critics and by most actors to provide 'Freudian' explanation for his twisted personality. However, he freely chooses to be a villain; the idea that a warped body absolves its owner from the moral responsibility for his evil acts is a modern concept,not an Elizabethan one.

Richard is called the merry hunchbacked villain. We have to notice his wry amusement in doing evil things, his own diabolical humour and his murderous practical joking, like a puppet master. He also enjoys his evil-doings. We can find Richard's sense of humour, his function as a clown, his comic irreverence and sarcastic or sardonic appropriation of things. So comic diabolism is more complex in the play.

He has a constantly clear view of himself. He is always conscious of how he presents himself to others. He is aware of what things really work and what men are really motivated by. He is superior in consciousness to his fellows. This has an apparent connection with his self-awareness. Richard's cold self-awareness enables him to make an accurate analysis not only of himself but also of others. Richard merrily talks to the audience after he succeeds in obtaining Anne,

> I'll be at charges for a looking-glass,
> And entertain a score or two tailors
> To study fashions to adorn my body:
> (Ⅰ. ii. 258-62)

He cannot cease staring at himself with delight, though he does not notice his attractiveness to women which Wolfgang Clemen points out. In contrast, Richard Ⅱ, concerning the glass or mirror, deplores it when he recognises his renouncement,

Let it command a mirror hither straight,
That it may show me what a face I have
Since it is bankrupt of his majesty.
(*Richard II*, Ⅳ. i . 265-67)

Richard Ⅱ, for the first time, has to see himself clearly and deeply in this scene. And he has to understand that the status of the king is unstable. His attitude to the glass or reflection is in sharp contrast with Richard Ⅲ's.

Richard Ⅲ is ready to act the next role. Now pious Richard enters with a book of prayer in Act Ⅲ scene vii. In this scene Richard is good at adopting the appearance of piety to persuade others, not being pious at all. There is an admirable moment when Londoners are being fooled into believing that he must be persuaded to be the king. We would see a drama within a drama. It is all sardonically jocular.

It is one of Richard's most characteristic scenes in Act Ⅲ scene v where he instructs Buckingham to play a 'deep tragedian'. The two perform a little farce for the credulous mayor's benefit. He makes this scene a ritual in order to get to the throne. He waits for the time when people call him a king. The situation is like the phrase 'Ripeness is all'. (*King Lear*, Ⅴ. ii . 11) We cannot deny our fascination with Richard's sardonic humour, wit and cleverness in evil.

Richard's skill of acting many roles reminds us of Coriolanus who plays in vain 'the man I am.' (*Coriolanus*, Ⅲ. ii .16) when he is asked to sue for the consul-ship by standing in the market place to beg the people's voices in humility. His failure to disguise his true mind is a good contrast with Richard's success in adopting the disguise of various characters.

In the farce of King Edward's attempt to reconcile all parties at court in Act Ⅱ scene i, we can find that some nobles act as if they would participate in a typical ritual scene. Before the king, they ceremoniously embrace each other warmly with false smiles. But after that many nobles related to the Queen are sent to the Tower of London to be executed by Richard. This shows the collapse of the reconciliation. The shallowness of reliability gives way easily to betrayal and violence. Even Buckingham is Richard's victim by showing reluctance for the plot against the princes in a later scene. Richard is an analyst of the springs of conduct in society. He can detect the differences between the mask and the reality. The cruel-comic side of Richard does not conceal itself inside his mind.

Richard's evilness and the War of Roses bring calamity to many nobles in the play. Duchess of York says with a deep sigh, "Why should calamity be full of words?" (IV. iv. 126) The feeling of grief is condensed into the rigid form of speech but such a feeling cannot be easily locked up in it. Nina S. Levine says that Shakespeare presents what many Elizabethans would have considered an acceptable model for female heroism with a string of lamenting women who grieve for their husbands and sons.

In this lament scene Margaret talks to Duchess of York with Elizabeth,

I had an Edward, till a Richard kill'd him;
I had a husband, till a Richard kill'd him:
Thou hadst an Edward, till a Richard kill'd him;
Thou hadst a Richard, till a Richard kill'd him.
(Ⅳ. iv . 40-44)

In her speech there is a dismal catalogue of who was who and who lost whom. It has full of grief and hate. We cannot immediately and clearly understand the situation or what happened to her. We can only understand that so many people were murdered in the past. In this complicated situation in her speech, only one thing is clear. Richard should be blamed for all that. She fearlessly exposes Richard's abominable crimes. In it 'a Richard kill'd Richard' is the phrase that sounds mysterious and somehow comic to us, though the situation is very serious. It seems to be some kind of word play. So the speech of Margaret slightly sounds awkward to us because we cannot judge whether she controls her grief or suffers the mortal grief at the loss of her relatives. But Jan Kott wisely says that there are many kings who have different faces but the same names, like Richard, Edward and Henry. It may have some connection with the bloody battles in the Middle Age. It makes such a complicated situation that we cannot easily believe in this riddle-like phrase. And this play has an

intimate connection with *3 Henry VI* which also unfolds the severer struggle for the power and the helpless cruelty. Donald Watson severely says that the excessive cruelty becomes not merely perversely comic but also more revolting in its ceremoniousness.

It is a world of absolute and hereditary moral ill, in which everyone is tainted with the treacheries and the blood of civil strife. Rossiter interestingly criticises that this history play is a kind of grisly comedy. According to his theory, there are three kinds of men in the play: they are the strong in evil, the feebly wicked and the helpless guilt-tainted. These kinds of people have to live in the world of this play. Our understanding of this situation is enhanced if we know the details of what comes into the play from *3 Henry VI*. The word 'guilt' occurs more often in this play than any other play in Shakespeare. It has often been remarked that all the characters in the play are at least partly guilty. The Lancasters and the Yorks cannot avoid being guilty not only in this play but also in real history.

Margaret has a role of bringing the bloody aspects in the War of Roses to this play, though in the historical interpretation the war was supposed to end at the coronation of Edward Ⅳ. She does not cease her own battle at the succession to the throne of Henry Ⅶ (Richmond). She appears in all the *Henry VI* trilogy in which she is a wife and mother of the king. And she becomes a representative of the grief of women. In this play Margaret becomes the incarnation of vengeance, Fury and Nemesis who is a goddess of retribution. She is taken as an accurate expositor for this play. She articulates the scheme of retributive justice. And she constantly calls upon the retributive justice of God, which punishes evil deeds. Margaret's curses fall on everyone except Buckingham, and they come horribly true in the play. This may give us an impression as if the play could be dominated by the power of words. But the great irony is that she deserves eternal condemnation for the crimes she has committed and must be punished by the same principles of retributive fulfilment.

In the true history Margaret left England for France in 1475 and died in 1482, before the death of Edward Ⅳ. In the Elizabethan stage she appears to live longer than in the history. When he decides to introduce her to this play, Shakespeare probably intends her to play the role of cursing others forever and to have the audience take a look at the historical events from another point of view.

In Shakespeare's Histories there are many references to the world, seasons and human life in general. Margaret depicts an excellent portrait of how the world goes,

> So now prosperity begins to mellow,
> And drop into the rotten mouth of death.
> (Ⅳ. iv. 1-2)

The imagery of growing fruit teaches us that glory does not continue. And it can be said that the cause of destruction is included in the glory of prosperity. 3 Citizen's words are suggestive of everything changing in accordance with the shifting of season,

> When cloud are seen, wise men put on their cloaks;
> When great leaves fall, then winter is at hand;
> When the sun sets, who doth not look for night?
> Untimely storms makes men expect a dearth.
> (Ⅱ. iii. 33-35)

Green leaves naturally turns yellow as the time goes. Another reference to the glory is Joan la Pucelle's words in *1 Henry VI*,

> Glory is like a circle in the water,
> Which never ceaseth to enlarge itself
> Till by broad spreading it disperse to nought.
> (*1 Henry VI*, Ⅰ. ii. 133-35)

The waves of fortune and fate are the same as this speech describes. Feelings of temporality, emptiness and transience of life arise not only in the characters but also in the audience's minds. Nothing is perpetual. So the humankind is involved in its situation.

This play is filled with so many deaths that the characters may almost be paralyzed with the fear of death. They seem to remain quite indifferent to it. It is not until they realise the fear of death that they have to face to it. We find that Hastings

philosophizes his death on his fall when he is to be executed. He tells in despair to anyone around him,

> They smile at me who shortly shall be dead.
> (Ⅲ. iv. 107)

His speech describes that the status of the nobles is uncertain and unstable, and easy to be destroyed by Richard's own will.

Richard's wry amusement threatens the world in the play. He relies on nobody and nobody relies on him. This situation is far from the ideal reign of the sovereign. This brings his complete isolation from others. Wolfgang Clemen points out that Richard's isolate self-absorption continues to be a keynote of his soliloquies in the play. For Richard, the isolation is desirable and the source of power in itself. We may admit that he plays the part of king with his usual merry critical detachment. But he cannot play the king well in the later part of the play. The early part of the play he succeeds in playing many roles. But once he is a king, his power of acting becomes feeble, weak and ineffective to others. He cannot control and dominate the situation so well as before. At the battle field in Bosworth he cries,

> A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!
> (V. iv. 7)

This sense of imbalance as a king symbolically shows his collapse and fall from the status of dominator. In the previous play he talks about his name with anxiety,

> Let me be Duke of Clarence, George of Gloucester,
> For Gloucester's dukedom is too ominous.
> (*3 Henry VI*, Ⅱ. vi. 106-107)

He feels that the name of Gloucester has the premonition of something bad. It reminds us of the proverbial horse of Sejanus, an unlucky horse, bringing disaster to the owner of it. Richard identifies himself as a Machiavel in *3 Henry VI*, where he declares he can 'set the murtherous Machiavel to school'(Ⅲ. ii. 193). He must smile and be a villain. It is a stock-in-trade of the ambitious Machiavel. He is an artist in evil. He often gets much enjoyment from his viciousness. He is leisurely moved by delight in evil-doing almost as much as by ambition.

The wheel of Fortune begins to circle around. And the Grand Mechanism which Jan Kott names, works on Richard and all the people under the heaven. In the play Scrivener cleverly knows what is what as he writes out a writ of execution for an already dead man. He says with a deep sigh, "bad is the world." (Ⅲ. vi. 10-14) Catesby's speech, "it is a reeling world." (Ⅲ. ii. 37) is highly suggestive of the disoriented world Richard would think to dominate. And nothing but disorder prevails. We can find the similar world as Hamlet refers to 'The time is out of joint.' (*Hamlet*, Ⅰ. v. 196) after he saw his father's ghost. Tyrel' words, "sin will pluck on sin." (Ⅳ. ii. 64) are enough explanation of why this world would be so helpless, relentless and terrible.

The main reason why this world goes bad is that transparent intent and result are remarkably outstanding. Everyone knows that Richard is suspicious of Clarence's death and Richard should be blamed for his murderous and monstrous deeds to get the English crown. But nobody dares to talk about it. Nothing happens to them if they are silent and obedient to him. Everyone strangely keeps silent, except Margaret who curses a lot of characters whose way to execution as victims attests to the accuracy of her fatal prophecies. There are fear, threat, treachery and violence. They have an intimate relation with the sense of chaos in the world.

We can find that the dramatic irony happens to Buckingham, (Ⅱ. i. 36-40), and Hastings. (Ⅲ. ii. 42-70) This is a good enough example of the disordered world. As said before, a closely related parallelism exists in the repeated occurrence. And Clarence's story of his dream has poetic passages. (Ⅰ. iv. 9-63) But it is a vision prophetic of his doom. His nightmare in the Tower terribly comes true at last. When he talks to the Second Murderer, Clarence appeals to divine law over human law. The argument for divine vengeance is out in the mouth of the weak who seek the protection from the strong. Many potential gruesome or shocking events are reported us, the most obvious among them being the death of the princes. In Richard's world, the very nature of

reality is unstable. Fiction may appear as solid as fact. Richard has a keen awareness of what other minds think. It could be said that he simply wants mastery over others. It appears that he desires power for its own sake. But the disastrous things fall back to Richard too in the end of the play. Everything might betray him. Nothing is perpetual.

Before the assassination of King Duncan, Macbeth is afraid that 'even-handed Justice' (*Macbeth*, Ⅰ. ⅶ. 10) works on him. Macbeth suffers constant agony from conscience. We can see the extreme difference of consciousness on conscience between Macbeth and Richard. Richard never suffers from the consciousness of usurpation. For him it is natural to murder people who obstruct his way to the crown. But after the dream of ghosts in Act Ⅴ. scene ⅲ, there is a sudden change in his mind. He is profoundly shaken by the nightmare in which many nobles appear as ghosts to threat him. But Shakespeare does not explain in detail why Richard is pricked with the conscience in the play. We do not participate in the agony of the loss of his soul. We cannot see Richard's rupture or collapse of his mind with the destruction and loss of a soul. John F. Danby says that Richard's conscience has awakened while he has slept. And Donald Watson also says that Richard becomes a man with a conscience. It is surprising to learn that he is subject to his nightmare. It is more puzzling when Richard on the eve of battle in Bosworth is woken into his final soliloquy on conscience.

It differs from the opening soliloquy in almost every way. Richard has never examined the working of his mind. He was only interested in carrying out his designs. He has revealed his plans and his thoughts which were deliberately controlled. He was utterly indifferent to guilt and he played the villain excellently in the first three acts. But in Act Ⅳ Richard completely changes. He is nervous, preoccupied, makes mistakes and loses control. He seems to lose the power to dominate the situation. He cannot play the role of the king any longer. Rather it seems to us that Richard would manage to play different role from that of the king. Richard laments the loss of his command's 'alacrity' (swiftness) and the military prowess on the eve of Bosworth. We have to notice Richard's failure to play the king and to command the powers which ought to belong to the sovereignty. Political ethics are so heavy a burden to Richard that he cannot bear it. A king truly tries to govern through mercy, justice and selfless care for his subjects. At this point Richard is no longer qualified as the king. To him a horse has the same value of his kingdom. There seems to be no absolute and stable value in this play.

The Second murderer of Clarence feels some pang of conscience in Act Ⅰ scene ⅳ, referring to divine justice. (Ⅰ. ⅳ. 128-138) In it he says, "it makes a man a coward." (128) He has second thoughts about murdering Clarence but he intentionally distorts his theory on conscience and decides to receive the monetary reward of his hideous deed. He probably provides an anticipatory commentary on Richard's final soliloquy (Ⅴ. ⅲ. 178-207). In it he says, "O coward conscience, how dost thou afflict me!"(180) The phrase of conscience reminds us of Hamlet's famous passage in his third soliloquy, 'Thus conscience does make coward of us all.' (*Hamlet*. Ⅲ. ⅰ. 83) It sounds a thoroughly different quality of consciousness from Richard's.

As is often said, there is some sense of tragic loss at Richard's death in the play. Willard Farnham says that Richard is the ambitious villain in fullest development, made into a tragic hero. His comment is suggestive to consider the characters in the tragedy. Richard says, "Richard loves Richard, that is, I am I." (Ⅴ. ⅲ. 184) This is, in a sense, one of sprouts growing up to ego which the characters have in the other plays, especially in tragedies, rather than the Histories. It might be said that his self-awareness is the same kind of protagonists as in the later tragedies. He also has the same kind of tragic element as a hero who is flawed yet noble. *Richard Ⅲ* becomes detached from the other history plays and has led to a long successful independent theatrical life because Richard has many faces and because of his superiority to the rest of mankind in the play. Shakespeare would find in the events of history and their interpretation a way of presenting dynamic human conflicts in the theatre. The argument ended, the victims dead and the battle done.

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