

### **Journal (and Reading) Questions for *Richard III***

Don't write on the back of the page— if you run over to a second page, that's OK. Please write in blue or black ink and leave margins. Identify the play and act at the top of the page, e.g., *R3I*. Fold the journal lengthwise and write your name, the date, and the play/act on the outside. Journals should be put on the front desk before class starts (they will be counted late if turned in during or after class). All journals need to show evidence of "close-reading": focus on particular quotes, some from that day's reading, to support interpretations.

One critic says the following: Richard's society—and Shakespeare's— clung to believing in the primacy of such Christian values as pity, love, and fear. The play throws the figure of Richard against this background, "not as a melodramatic monster, but as the interpreter of an actual society. He rejects 'pity, love, and fear' and kills the king who stands for the holy order of these values." Our society faces the same choices: we might consider Richard as demonstrating the wit and will of the individual (note Norman Vincent Peale) in refusing to succumb to circumstance and rule (though he's an "underdog" only in one sense— as heir to the crown). Is it possible to be an economic and social "success" without interfering with the lives and happiness of others? The play explores the problem of justice, the problem with Christianity (passivity, victimization), and the problem of "will" (the ability to make one's own fate). How can we tell "criminal ambition" from ambition?

**General Questions the play poses:** Richard is the first of Shakespeare's great "self-fashioners" and the epitome of qualities associated with "masculine" strength. The play explores the benefit and the handicap of not having a conscience (to oneself and to success in politics).

- 1) What are the consequences to the individual of this kind of "self-making"? (Richard brags about changing shapes with Proteus, framing his face for all occasions, smiling and murdering while he smiles. He thrills in his own sprezzatura: the whole world is his puppet! (P. 335)
- 2) Minor characters are "types": kinds of reasons people "co-operate;" kinds of reasons they don't. What strategies and approaches does Richard use to deal with each successfully?
- 3) What factors cause his downfall? (Consider in what sense these are predictable and why Richard, given his intelligence, does not predict them— look for speeches where he provides his reasoning.) How does the play confirm or challenge his idea of what counts as strength and what counts as weakness?
- 4) Richard assumes that a strong individual can control history. What features in the play suggest that in some ways individuals cannot control "history"? Consider the role of Margaret and of curses and dreams.

#### **Act 1:**

The opening soliloquy provides evidence of Richard's view about the nature of "reality." Look closely at the phrases and images he uses to describe war and peace. Then decide which he respects more not because of the way he is, but because of the "nature" of war vs. the "nature" of peace. Find at least 3 specific words/images with revealing associations: a word like "capers," for instance, is associated with peace. Suppose an American President were described as "capering"? (What character qualities and attitudes would this suggest and why?)

**Act 2:** Look closely at Clarence's dream: it provides insights regarding many threads explored in the play: the limitations of "intellect"; the weakness/strength of "goodness"; the nature of justice. What do images in this speech suggest about life and death?

### **Act 3:**

1. Richard's forte is his ability to predict people's responses and play on their weaknesses. He also, however, makes some errors in thinking. Identify comments and acts that demonstrate either his intellectual strengths (explaining why) or the weaknesses in his thinking (things he is not taking into account that might cause his downfall). Make sure to use some evidence from Act III.
2. Hastings is a loyal follower. He is, however, blind. (This blindness is rooted partly in loyalty, but partly into a kind of thinking that is less admirable.) Look particularly at the conversation with Catesby and Hastings (3.2.35- 90, pp. 585-6) and identify what evidence is available to him. What kind of thinking prevents him from seeing it?

### **Acts 4 and 5:**

1. Richard seduces Anne and Queen Elizabeth in much the same way. What aspects associated with the feminine personality does Richard assume for these seductions and what emotions does he try to evoke from both Anne and Elizabeth?
2. How does the remembrance of curses by the people cursed work in this play? What functions do dreams have in this play with regard to our interpretation of the meaning of events?
3. Why keep Margaret in this play and have all the characters remember her curses (and their own upon themselves)?
4. What qualities or skills does Richard demonstrate that make him more successful at getting than keeping the crown?
5. Why is the play so full of "balanced" or paired things? ( the wooing of Anne/ the wooing of Elizabeth; the curse or prophecy/the remembrance of the curse or prophecy; the unwitting self-curse/ fulfillment of that curse; the tent of Richmond/ the tent of Richard and balanced comments of ghosts to each). Consider how the pairs might comment in some way on the nature of justice? On the nature of Richard's efficacy as 1) an aspirer to the crown and 2) a ruler?

P.S. If you would like to **rearrange Henry Tudor's face**, go to the following website (it is part of the site maintained by the R3 Society, dedicated to "reassessing Richard's life and reign"):  
<http://www.r3.org/alexwarp/henry7.html>